

DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS IN SUNNY INDIA



By BEATRICE M. HARBAND

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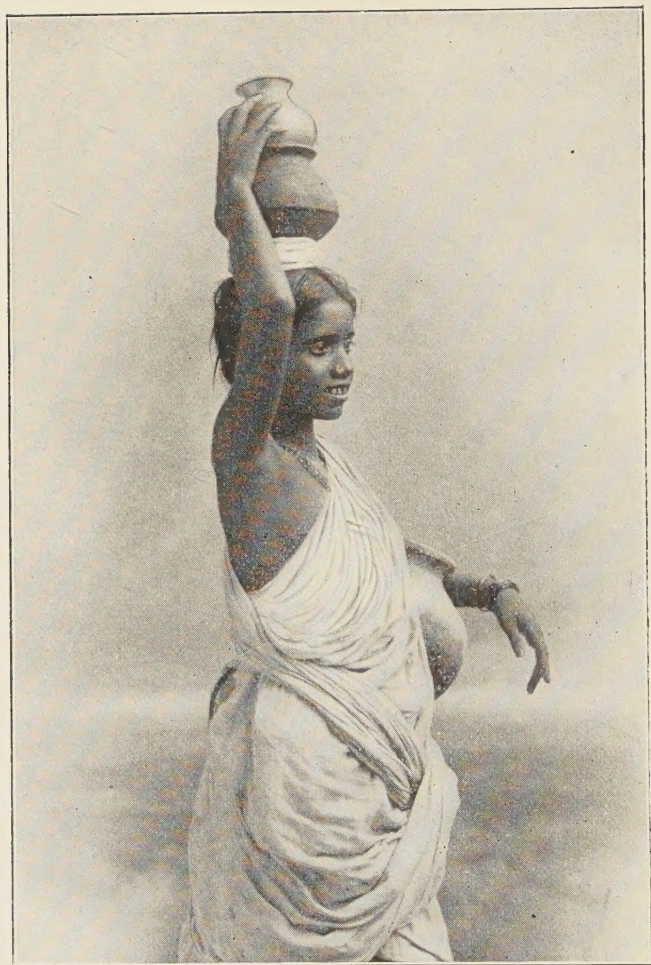
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DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS
IN SUNNY INDIA

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SUNDARI.

Daughters of Darkness In Sunny India

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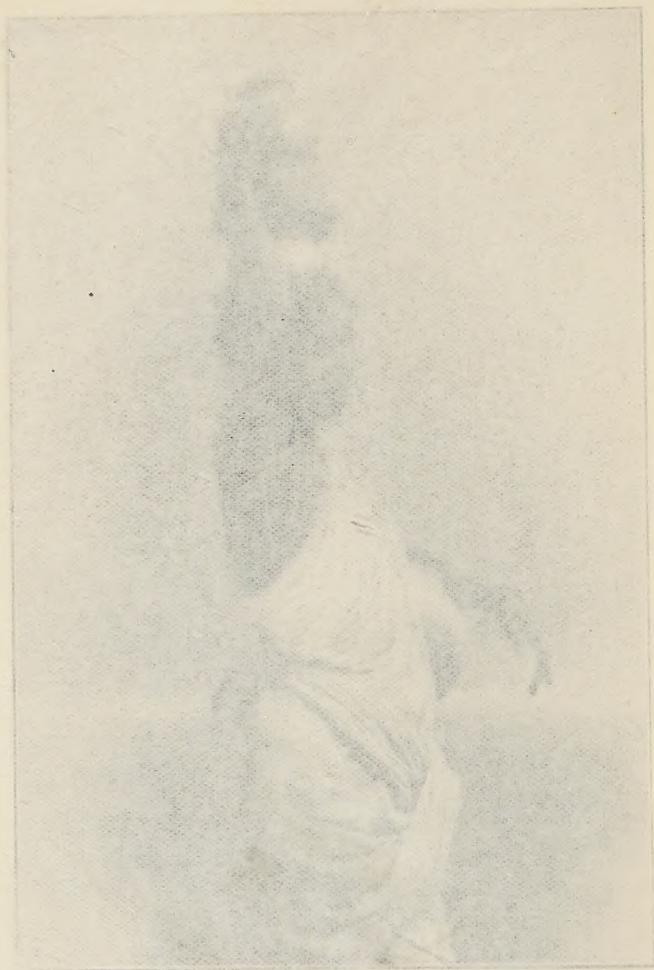
Author of "Under the Shadow of Durgamma," etc.



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*To the living memory of my dearly loved mother
whose ministry of suffering taught me amongst many
other lessons that : —*

*“They also serve
Who only stand and wait”*

*I dedicate these facts and fancies culled from my short
period of service amongst the women and children of
Heathen India.*

"The issue of security and the situation of the world, a kind of
balance of power, and of the danger of war, without
any other consideration for the rights of the people." ... THE NEWS OF
1/8

"It was not only the issue of the situation of the world, but
the issue of the rights of the people, which was the main
issue of the situation of the world." ... THE NEWS OF 1/8

Preface

THIS little volume is sent forth in the hope that the true story of some of the sufferings of India's daughters may appeal to the sympathetic hearts of the more favoured daughters of lands where Jesus, the light of the world rules and reigns.

Every fact I have related has been recorded as faithfully as possible. The fancies are few and far between, but of necessity they have had to be introduced in making an harmonious whole from incidents culled from the missionary career of the late Rev. Edwin Lewis, Mrs. Lewis and myself.

In the benign silvery haired Mr. Burton discoursing to the shepherds by the wayside, and instructing Lingappa by night, many of my readers, especially those in Australia and New Zealand, will soon recognize the late Rev. E. Lewis of Bellary. His experiences that I have woven into my story have had to be written from memory of the thrilling tales that he himself related to me during the few months that I had the privilege of living near him and Mrs. Lewis, in my early days at Bellary, South India.

I would fain have lingered longer with my

friends and gone on to relate some stirring episodes in their lives after they set out in the New Way; but it was on behalf of the dark, ignorant, superstitious, enslaved Hindu and Mohammedan women that I first took up my pen. Many of their sorrows arise from sufferings that may not be touched upon in a book of this description. These sufferings are the natural outcome of a land where the ruling deities are the creations of the minds of evil men wholly given over to the works of the flesh.

If, by the reading of my little story, but one heart be stirred to a life of consecration for Christ and India, I shall rejoice to know that my labour of love has not been in vain.

BEATRICE M. HARRAND.

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Daughters of Darkness In Sunny India

I

A MUSSULMAN TRICKED BY A MERCHANT

IN past ages, there lived in the Brahman village of Somapura, a Brahman named Chandrabhatta. According to the rules of his caste, he made a living by begging from the charitably disposed. One day he heard that the king of Dharapatna was bestowing great wealth upon Brahmans, and so he thought that he, too, must of necessity have his share of any good thing that was to be obtained. For this purpose, he set out quite alone on the journey he must undertake to reach Dharapatna. On arriving at the outskirts of the city, he entered a garden that was close at hand, and saw in it a beautiful lake shining with clear water, pleasant with the sweet songs of lovely water fowls, and beautiful with full blown flowers. He was very tired from all the difficulties of the way, and so he decided

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to bathe in the cold water, eat his food, take a little rest, and then enter the city.

Accordingly, he descended into the lake, and washed his face; then he bathed. Suddenly he remembered that he had no purple stock leaves with which to worship God. After looking here, there, and everywhere, for the holy plant, he at last saw one growing by itself near a Mussulman's mosque which was by the side of the garden. The sacred water which he carried in his Chumbu,¹ he poured over the leaves of that plant, and the muddy water from beneath it, he poured on his own head. Going round and round the plant, he folded his hands, and then plucked the leaves by twos and threes.

In the mosque there was a Mussulman who watched all that the Brahman did, and at last he came to him and said: "O Brahman, are you a fool? What do you mean by worshipping a plant?"

The Brahman replied, "O Mussulman, this is not a mere plant, it is my god, therefore I worship it."

Then the Mussulman saying, "O Brahman, is this thy god; what can this do? It has not sufficient power to destroy the hair of my body," kicked the plant with the shoe on his foot, pulled it up by the roots, rubbed it over his body, pressed it in his hands, and then threw it down. As he did this, he turned again to the Brahman,

¹ A drinking vessel.

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and saying in a mocking tone, "Now do you see the power of your god?" went back to the mosque.

A merchant who was going by the mosque to trade in a village near that town, seeing all that the wicked Mussulman had done with the holy Tulsai plant, determined to deceive him. For this purpose, he laid the sack that was on his back under the tree, found a prickly plant bush, and began walking round and round it worshipping it openly in full face of the Mussulman.

He, seeing this, said to himself, this man is possessed with the same madness as that Brahman, so he came to the merchant and spoke to him, saying, "O merchant, what is this folly? Why are you going round this plant and worshipping it?"

The merchant replied, "O Mussulman, this is my family god; it is a very cruel god, therefore it must be worshipped with entire devotion."

The Mussulman answered, "Fie, fie, you all lack wisdom, what power has this leaf?" so rebuking the merchant he proudly pulled the plant from its root, rubbed the leaves over his legs and threw them away. But immediately, in great distress caused by the pricking and burning of the prickly leaves he spoke in very humble language. "Alas: alas, O merchant, your words are very true; your god is indeed a very cruel god. Oh! the pain that is all over my body. It burns me greatly, what must I do?"

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The merchant replied, "O Mussulman, what can I do? As you have done wrong to my god, confess your fault to him, and promise to lay money at his feet for an offering. This money you may give to me, and I will pray my god to cure you."

The Mussulman, greatly desiring to be free from his pain, gave to the merchant, for a votive offering, all the money that was in his pocket. The merchant took possession of the ten pagodas thus laid at his feet and with four pie, he bought a little castor oil which he smeared all over the Mussulman's body, rubbing it well in, until the pricking and burning sensation stopped. He then made salaam to the Mussulman and went on his way.¹

Thus a dark-skinned Indian maiden poured out her story in the soft liquid tones of the Kanarese people. Her audience was composed of village children, boys and girls with nothing to occupy their time, but to lie idly in the shadows cast by the grim, ugly walls of the idol temple close at hand.

Sundari had lately developed quite a faculty for story telling, and would often hold her companions spellbound, as she narrated to them, in her own expressive way, and with sundry additions of her own inventive genius, the stories that her father now and again repeated in her hearing.

He was the village carpenter, and as such, had

¹ From the *Katha Sanghra*.

to keep the village temples in repair. This work had been done by his father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather before him. It looked as though the succession was not to be continued in his family for as yet, the gods had given him no son.

As he made his daily round of the temples, he heard many of the stories that the priests recited, and having a retentive memory he stored them up until, upon some appropriate occasion he rehearsed them for the benefit of some of his neighbours.

Sundari, his daughter, was as pretty a little specimen of Eastern childhood as could be found amongst the village folk of Southern India. She was small and might have been any age from seven to ten or eleven, but neither her father nor mother had troubled to keep count of the years that had gone by since the disappointing news had been whispered from one to another that the carpenter Lingappa's first-born was a daughter.

Her small brown face was surmounted by a mass of soft, shining, rippling strands of hair that looked as though it only needed the loving touch of her mother's hand to coax it into the most bewitching of little curls.

Her mouth was sweetly sensitive, with the slightest suspicion of roguishness which was enhanced when her lips unclosed, and displayed a perfect set of pearly teeth that many a Western

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mother would have envied for her own delicately nurtured darling. There was a decided piquancy about her nose, and her black eyes shone and sparkled like bright stars in the darkest of mid-night skies.

She carried her little figure erect for she had early learned to poise the water-pot upon her head, and now she could even carry her baby sister upon her hip, and balance the water-pot upon her head with her one disengaged hand. Village custom did not demand that she should be burdened with over-much clothing, and Sundari could remember quite well when her mother first folded a piece of her own sari around her, and she did not like it at all.

Even now, she sometimes envied the freedom of limb and action, that the tiny girls of the village had in their close-fitting brown-skin dresses with only a string tied round their waist.

One day, when her father had been into the market town of Ballapura, he had brought her back a small new sari which she had been quite proud to wear but that was a very long time ago. Now it was old and thin, and even ragged; for it had been washed often and worn much. The end that went over her head was almost like a fringe with the constant pulling up that she had given it, first to try and hide the long ropes of matted hair that had taken years to grow to the desired length, and then to cover her poor little head that felt so bare and miserable after her

hair had been cut off and offered to a god whose image her father and mother constantly worshipped in a near temple.

She was only just learning to walk when her parents had vowed to present her hair to their particular deity in return for the blessing of a son. From the day the vow was made until the hour she was taken to the temple to have it cut off by the priest her hair had grown longer and longer, and as neither comb nor water was allowed to touch it, it became terribly matted with filth until it hung like thick, heavy, muddy ropes from her small head.

She was glad to get rid of the dirty hair; for it was dreadfully burdensome, but for weeks she had kept closely at home, feeling only too consciously ashamed of her greatly changed appearance. Soon, her mother noted with joy the soft pretty black hair that was covering her child's little head once more, and during the past weeks had often washed it with Sekai,¹ and administered sundry anointings with cocoanut oil.

Sundari had no looking-glass to keep her informed of the rate of progress that her hair was making; but by continually passing her hand over her shaven head she soon found out that the bare skin could be no longer visible, and so she had again ventured to join her village companions, and to take up her old pastime of story-telling.

¹ Soap nut.

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“The story of how the wily merchant tricked the Mussulman” was a favourite with all the children. Every time it was repeated, they seemed to enjoy it more than before, and never failed to greet with peals of derisive laughter the conclusion of how the Mussulman smarted in body and in pocket for his mocking propensities. These village children had only seen one Mussulman in all their lives, and to them he was the very man who had been so reckless as to smear the prickly plant on his bare body. They shared with their elders a keen dislike of this man who every now and again appeared in their midst, wearing long baggy undergarments, and a turban which was twisted in such a ridiculous fashion that an end of it hung like a tail down his back. He carried a book in his hand from which he read to them whether they cared to listen or not.

Sundari’s funny stories were much more interesting than the Mussulman’s long dissertations on god and his holy prophet Mahomet. But still even such an unwelcome intruder as the Mussulman brought a change into the monotony of their unchildlike lives; for these children of sunny India were more like grown men and women made small than like the children of Western lands and homes.

They had never learned how to play, or to run and jump with the happy freedom of unconscious childhood. Instead of skipping and dancing through the early years of their life, they began

A Mussulman Tricked by a Merchant 19

to toddle soberly, and then to walk with the gait of one quite grown up, and burdened with the weary weight of many years.

From their earliest infancy, the girls could carry the pots of water, and help with the simple cooking preparations: they learned to winnow the grain, roll the curry stuff, pick the tamarind, smear the floor with cow dung, gather together the wood, and make the bratties that constituted such a large part of the daily fuel, and then as they grew a little older, they had to go out into the fields with their fathers and mothers, and help in the work they did there, for these children were no high born Brahman girls to be kept in retirement and idleness.

While Sundari recited her story, the children had all been too absorbed in listening to the ever fascinating tale to hear the approach of some one who had slipped off his red leather shoes in order to keep from arousing the attention of the interested group, and so that he might appear as a sudden apparition in their midst.

As Sundari finished, she lifted up her eyes to note the approval that she fully expected to see on the faces of her audience, but her love of praise was doomed to disappointment, for instead of the faces of her companions her eyes rested upon some one who caused her to utter a startled cry of, "The Mussulman," and to make a desperate attempt to push past all the children and to disappear within the nearest door that stood

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open. All the others caught the note of fear in her voice and followed her example as quickly as their lazy habits would permit of, but not before they saw the Mussulman had arrested the flying feet of Sundari by catching at the child's dirty cloth, and holding her a fast prisoner.

"I won't say it again, let me go, let me go," screamed the excited child.

"You are Sundari, the daughter of Lingappa," said the man. "Where is your father?"

"Oh, I don't know, let me go," came the answer and with a mighty effort she was free, leaving one end of her rotten old sari in her captor's hands.

It was only the work of a second to reach a place of safety, and the baffled Mussulman turned away, calling upon God to take vengeance upon the youthful sinners.

II

THE SHAKING DEVIL

THE house in which Sundari took shelter was one of the best in the village. The blackness of age caused the quaint carving with which the woodwork was ornamented to stand out in bold relief. On each side of the door, there was a raised platform of mud and cement, called a pial, and on this Lingappa sat, or lay to rest after his day's work was over. Here too, he entertained his neighbours and friends. The house pial was also a favourite spot with his wife, for it was so conveniently public to bring out her curry stone, and make her preparations for the forthcoming meal while she gossiped with the village women as they passed and repassed, or noted the condition of her neighbours' cattle, buffaloes or goats as they wandered up and down the narrow openings which were dignified by the name of streets.

The carpenter's house boasted two rooms or compartments. The best one was in the front, and was devoted to the use of two really fine buffaloes, and a few goats. The second room led out of the first and was only divided from it by a raised floor, and some beams placed at in-

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tervals like the posts of a fence, only that they reached from floor to ceiling. In this room the family ate, drank, slept, and lived generally.

This inner living room was devoid of windows, doors or chimneys, and was quite dependent for light upon the front door, and a few chinks in the thatch of the roof.

What was lacking in furniture was not noticed by the ordinary visitor, for furniture was not fashionable amongst the village folk of Lingapura. A mat to sleep on, and a few earthen chatties with three or four brass vessels was all that these simple people needed as household requisites.

The mingled odours from the little recess at the back where the cooking was done, the smell from the animals themselves, and from the piles of their food stored in all sorts of odd corners, to say nothing of that emitted from the dirty drainage that trickled slowly through the lower room, made up an aroma that defied classification under any known name.

After getting accustomed to the gloom of the dark unfurnished room, Sundari made her way to the darkest corner, where lay what appeared to be a heap of rags. As her light step crossed the mud floor, the rags seemed to move, and then to be in convulsions, but no sound was heard until the child had recovered her breath sufficiently to say, "Alas ! My mother, has the cold fever come to you again ?"

At the sound of her voice, the rags moved

more convulsively than ever, and a woman slowly raised herself to a sitting position. Her eyes were brilliant with fever, her long black hair was dishevelled, and as she tried to open her parched lips to speak, her teeth chattered violently with the fit of ague that was upon her.

"Yes, yes," she grasped out at last, "the fever has come again. The demon has me in his strong grip. If we were only rich like the sowcar who swallows up all our money, we might hire the devil dancers to drive out this evil spirit. First it burns me, and then it shakes, and shakes, and shakes; oh! oh! oh! it will shake me to pieces," she moaned as she tried to huddle her rags closer around her.

Sundari stood mute with pity, for she dare not speak in the presence of such supernatural power. Inwardly she quaked with fear lest the shaking devil that so unmistakably possessed her mother should seize upon her also.

After a few moments, the fit of ague spent itself and once more the mother raised herself and begged for a little water as she felt the fever coursing through her veins. The silent child moved to where a brass chumbu stood, but not a drop of the precious liquid did it contain.

"My mother, there is no water; I must go to the well, and it will take long to get the chatty filled, for the hole is nearly dry."

Poor fever stricken daughter of darkest heathenism, not a drop of cold water to cool your

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parched tongue, no gentle hand and loving voice to minister to you in this your hour of need. No, you must lie there in all your misery, while the fever demon shakes and tears you because your countrymen are like unto the cruel and senseless gods enthroned in their own evil and dark imaginations, and because those, who are able to bring to your soul good tidings of great joy, and to minister to your physical needs, sit at home in ease and comfort surrounded by all the luxuries that wealth can bestow, and enjoying to the full the privileges of their Christian womanhood!

Poor little Sundari felt too frightened to venture out into the sunshine where there was any chance of the Mussulman being still about, so she lingered as long as she possibly could before taking up her water pot. Meanwhile her mother had fallen into a light sleep, but woke again with another violent fit of shivering, and with it another accession of superstitious fear seized Sundari. Finally her fear of the fever devil overcame her dread of the Mussulman, and she braced herself up to take the walk for the much needed water. Her bare brown feet tripped lightly, though quickly, over the rough, uneven, narrow streets that led from her father's house to the outskirts of the village, and soon she was speeding along the dusty road on her way to the water hole upon which the whole of the village depended for the supply of their daily needs.

This water hole was in the centre of a broad shingle bed, which in the month of July ought to have been a wide expanse of shining, flowing water, but for two years the Monsoon had failed. Day by day heavy clouds had banked up in the sky, but the much wished for, and apparently near rain had ended in a few drops only, and then the wind had freshened from another quarter, and driven the clouds in an opposite direction, leaving an azure sky and the sun pouring forth his scorching rays until every green blade had dried up.

One by one the water holes in the bed of the river had run dry, till in this second year of drought, there was only this one hole left. Round it, all day long, sat the patient women and girls, waiting their turn to dip their half cocoanut shell into the muddy liquid, and so fill their household chatty. It was marvellous how that one water hole held out and supplied the hundreds who daily dipped into it.

With what looked very much like stolid indifference the villagers continued dipping up until scarcely a thimbleful remained as evening came on, but the next morning would be sure to find a fresh supply had percolated through the dry shingle.

When Sundari reached the hole, seven women were there before her, and so she put down her heavy pot and took up her favourite attitude upon the shingle. The child sat with her chin down

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on her knees, which she clasped with her hands, and watched the movements of her companions with her shining black eyes. Ever and anon more women joined the group, and as each one knelt by the hole, filled her pot and went away, another quickly took her place fearful of losing her turn. It was the idle ones who indulged in various scraps of conversation to wile away the time.

"My master went to the market yesterday to sell the limes; they are the last from our garden, and so small that he only got two annas for fifty. Oh! why does the rain not come so that the trees may grow, and we can sow our grain?" said a healthy looking girl of about sixteen. Her water pot lay on the shingle at her feet, and two restless children clung to her sari.

"Of course your limes won't grow," retorted an older woman, to whom the remark had not been addressed. "Your master lingers in the market-place listening to the white Dhorai's words about another Mahadeva whom we do not worship. Lingappa, the carpenter, saw him there only yesterday."

"My master does pooja every day, and offers the best of our limes to Basavana," averred the first speaker. Sundari was on the alert, for she fancied the two women were on the verge of a quarrel, and her bright eyes sparkled in anticipation of what the result might be, but dropped as the next words fell upon her ears. "Your

master talks to the Mussulman, and invites him into the house to read his holy book."

"Your mother-in-law's nose turns up, and her legs are crooked," was the spiteful reply. The girl's anger was now fully aroused and she could not keep back her most poisoned arrow. Catching up her twin boys she screamed out so that all might hear her, "Ha, ha, I have two sons, and you, why you are that miserable creature, a childless wife. You have tried the gods all round to give you a son, and now perhaps your master is trying what the Mussulman's god can do."

The women heard, as she intended they should, and they greeted her words with peals of derisive laughter at the expense of the childless woman, whom they all knew to be burning with jealousy when she looked at the fine healthy boys of her young neighbour.

The mother of the twins moved to the hole as she spoke, and soon became absorbed in her occupation, and when she had filled her chatty, Sundari took her place.

It was weary work, but she persevered until the large vessel was full, when she lifted it gracefully upon her head, and rose from her lowly attitude to carry home that which had cost her both time and labour.

Was it that the pot was unusually heavy, or did her foot trip in some of the loose shingle, or was it the sight of the Mussulman in the distance that caused her to overbalance herself and fall

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forward spilling every drop of the precious water that she had scooped up with such infinite pains.

Meanwhile another, and yet another woman had approached the hole, and the child had to again fall into the ranks of the waiting ones, for she knew it would be useless to return home without the necessary water. Her bright eyes filled with tears as she thought of all her labour spent in vain; and then her heart beat more rapidly as she remembered that her accident had prevented her coming face to face with the very man who must have heard the story she had been telling earlier in the afternoon, at the expense of him, and his fellow caste men.

The Mohammedan emissary of the rich money lender in Ballapura went on his way all unconscious of the fear the sight of him had aroused in the mind of the small brown maiden who had attracted him, first of all by her ready flow of language, and then by her lively gestures that gave such piquancy to the narrative she was relating.

He determined to arouse the curiosity of his master, by telling him of the little village girl. He was rich, and could afford to increase the women of his harem, and to indulge his taste for pretty women and girls. Besides if his desires lay in the same direction as the holy prophet's, why should he not indulge them even as the prophet of old did. As he communed thus with himself, he came to the conclusion that the lovely

Ayesha, upon whom Mahomet had lavished such a wealth of tender love, must have been bright and beautiful as the village owner of the sparkling eyes, and soft curling hair. He imagined that if he succeeded in introducing this new childish beauty to his master's notice, there would probably be a good number of rupees to add to his own slowly-increasing hoard. He was ambitious to become a money-lender himself, but his difficulty was to get the capital to start with. Rolling in wealth as his master was, he paid his agents only the minimum wage for the maximum amount of work. The man's cunning eyes gleamed, as in fancy he saw himself enriched by a great stroke of diplomacy in bringing to the notice of Abu Taleb, the money-lender, the fresh young loveliness of Sundari, the daughter of Lingappa, the recognized carpenter of the village of Lingapura.

And Sundari, the little maid sitting so patiently on the shingle bed of the river was quietly allowing little pearly drops to course down her dark cheeks as a relief to the undefined fear that held her in as close a clutch as the shaking devil did her mother.

III

ABU TALEB

THE great heat of the day had passed, and the loungers who crowded the bazaars from early morning until late at night were thankful for a little respite from the burning rays of the tropical sun. Some of the bazaar vendors were even thinking of closing up for the night, and finding their way to such mysterious haunts as did duty for a home.

But Abu Taleb was not one of this number. His place of business was always open until a very late hour, for he studied the convenience of his patrons who were not customers in the ordinary sense of the word.

Almost hourly they came, for a little private audience with the exacting money-lender, and they seldom departed without bowing meekly to the great man's terms and accepting the usurious rate of interest for the small loans he negotiated.

Sometimes he dealt in a very large way of business, and advanced to his clients some thousands of rupees, but such loans were only for those who could give him good security for his money. Landed property, and family jewels he considered his best investments.

Now, as the shades of evening were drawing on, he reclined on the somewhat soiled white pillows that did duty for a seat and a lounge, and waited without the least sign of impatience for the next call upon his attention.

Abu's pale complexion and raven hair were enhanced by the bewildering gorgeousness of his picturesque Eastern costume. Over his wide, embroidered white trousers he wore a snowy muslin shirt which reached to his knees. The starched cuffs were fastened with diamond links; jewels also flashed from the breast of his outer garment which was scarcely concealed by a beautiful yellow satin waistcoat, elaborately embroidered in silver. On his head, in place of the turban of outdoor wear, was perched a jaunty little skull-cap of violet velvet literally covered with a profusion of golden embroidery.

Ever and anon he toyed with a heavy gold watch chain, and as he lifted his hands up they too, displayed brilliant gems in the rings that adorned his fingers. He was fond of display, and believed that a great appearance of wealth was conducive to the welfare of the business in which he was engaged.

Nearly every one who passed his bazaar salaamed punctiliously to the great man, and his more intimate friends often paused to pass a few remarks. Sometimes Abu was chatty as well as witty, but this was only with quite a favoured few. On the whole his nature was reserved, and

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he was silent as became the man who knew the monetary secrets of more than half the upper classes of the inhabitants of Ballapura.

By and by he roused himself from his easy lounging attitude, and touched a small bell, the sound of which quickly brought a clerk from a back apartment, but before he could give any directions to the man, his eyes gleamed with a look of satisfaction as he saw a fellow-devotee of the holy prophet approaching with stately step along the narrow thoroughfare in which his business was conducted. Abu rose to greet him, for he was an elderly man, and as such demanded this act of courtesy from the younger one. The salutations over, the elder man said, "Allah is good to his faithful ones. The rain still holds off and grain is going up in price. To-day rice is eight measures to the rupee, last week it was ten; we shall be rich men in a month's time. Think of the thousands of measures of rice and cholum stored in our granary for just such a time as this," and he rolled his eyes piously.

"Oh my father," replied Abu, "but what good prices we have already obtained by sending it away to the famine districts. Can we do better still?" and a sinister gleam shot from his dark eyes, giving them the expression of a cat ready to spring upon its prey.

"Yes, yes, my son, we can get our own price very shortly. The Madras and Bombay papers are full of the generosity of the English and

American people in sending large sums of money to help the famine stricken of our land. Lakhs of rupees are coming in every week and we must take care to enrich ourselves." Into the midst of their avaricious thoughts came the moment for prayer, and the two men, heedless of passers-by, turned their faces towards Mecca, and did their duty as good Mohammedans and faithful followers of their prophet. A few paces down the street another Mohammedan was obeying the prayer summons: he spread his tiny scrap of prayer-carpet, slipped off his shoes, turned in the direction of the Mohammedan Kebla, and in a drawling but unctuous tone, repeated the required formula, and went carefully through all the attitudes and genuflexions prescribed for a man of his station in life.

First he stood upright with his hands hanging down, and his feet slightly apart; next he raised his hands and held them in such a position as to cause the thumbs just to touch the lobe of the ear. This seemed to be preliminary to what followed, for he slowly brought his hands together, taking care that the right one should be uppermost, then bowing low with a movement that seemed to come from the waist, he quickly spread his hands upon his knees, rising again, he fell upon his knees, placed his hands upon the ground and lowered his face until he touched mother earth with his nose and forehead; then without rising he sank gradually backwards and

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made two bows, after which he rose to his feet keeping them in one position, and clasping his hands in an attitude of supplication. These movements he went through five or six times and finally he stood erect holding his hands before his face as though reading from a book.

This part of his devotions being ended, he gently stroked his face and beard, rolled up his tiny carpet, slipped on his shoes, and continued his journey. A few steps brought him to the door of Abu Taleb's bazaar where to his disappointment he found his master engaged with the old grain merchant, Abdallah.

Soon, the sowcar and the grain merchant parted, but the newcomer waited for the money-lender to resume his comfortable attitude upon the lounge before he signified his arrival.

He slipped his bare feet from his pointed red leather shoes, raised his turban, and mopped his moist forehead with a dirty handkerchief, then coughed insinuatingly as though to strangle a mighty outburst; but his apparent effort was such a complete failure, that his real intention of attracting his master's attention proved entirely successful.

Abu looked up with an indifferent expression, and Osman, his servant, putting both hands to his forehead, bowed himself almost level with the ground, but uttered no word of greeting.

"Peace be to thee, my son, what news do you bring?"

"I have performed the *Salah's* commands, and have just returned from Lingapura."

"Ha: that is well," drawled out the autocrat of the Ballapura money market, and he looked his next question rather than asked it.

"The land is dry and waste, the ground is parched for want of rain. Some few ryots have tried to grow then gram, but the stunted blades wither and die as soon as they appear above the ground."

He paused to take breath, and seemed to need some encouragement to proceed with his report.

"Is that all?"

"Very few of the villages have any water supply to depend upon. Nearly all the wells are quite dry. Some of the women are walking two and three miles to obtain one chatty of water."

"God is one, and Mahomet is His prophet," was the pious remark of Abu. "Oh, friend, did you not counsel these villagers to forsake their idols and call upon Allah to send showers of refreshing upon their thirsty land?"

Osman winced slightly at the "oh friend," with which his master prefaced his reply, and wondered what would come next.

"Alas, alas, my master, they laugh and ridicule when the name of Allah is mentioned. Many of those who have hitherto listened to the sacred Koran would not invite me to read to day. The most interested ones had their excuses ready, and I was forced to close the holy book. There

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is a wide-spread report that Shiva, the destroyer, is determined to have his revenge upon the people, for not only listening to the words of the Koran, but also for drinking in the Christian doctrines of Dhorai Burton, the English missionary."

During this long dissertation Abu's attention began to wander, but upon the sound of approaching carriage wheels, he was on the alert once more, and suddenly rose to his feet to make a profound salaam to the occupant of the bandy¹ who was an English lady accompanied by two native girls who instinctively drew their saris closer around their heads as they caught sight of the Mohammedan gentleman, and his servant making their salaams with so much exaggerated politeness.

As the carriage passed, Abu murmured, "Oh, these Englishwomen, with what boldness they shew their bare faces in the public bazaar," and Osman, his servant, whispered as though to himself, "A vision of loveliness, Sahib, not the miserable white-faced English missionary, how I hate her, but the glowing beauty of the dark-eyed girls, her servants, Sahib. Bible-women they call themselves. Oh, just to gaze at them makes my old heart glow," and he laid his skinny, brown hand near the region where he fondly imagined his heart was located.

The sowcar vouchsafed no reply but threw

¹ Carriage.

himself again on his pillows, commanded Osman to be seated, and with a peculiar movement of his jewelled hand indicated that he was ready to hear any further news.

"Sahib, I carried out your orders faithfully."

"Yes, yes, tell me everything."

"I saw Lingappa, the carpenter."

"Did he pay you the interest on the loan?"

"I saw Lingappa the carpenter, and reminded him of your kindness in waiting a week for the payment of his debt," calmly continued the emissary; "he has no money to pay, Sahib."

"Well."

"He has two fine fat buffaloes."

"Oh you are a trusty servant, Osman. Food for animals is almost at famine price. Everybody wants to sell but very few will buy; and they only give a very low price," said the Musulman with a reflective air. "True, true, but they are fine fat buffaloes you say."

"Yes, the carpenter has stinted himself and children to get the necessary food for the animals. Hitherto he has gained part of his living by lending the buffaloes for ploughing, and drawing water; but the rain has failed, and who can afford to hire buffaloes?"

"I am weary of all this talk, Osman. You have sold the buffaloes, and can now pay me the quarter's interest due on Lingappa's loan," said Abu in a tone that was meant to be assertive, but only proved to be interrogative. Osman had

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been forced into a corner before now, when his master had adopted a similar method of making him pay up when he had failed to obtain the money from those who were in the sowcar's debt, and so he hastened to extricate himself by saying in a very confidential tone,

"Lingappa has a daughter."

"A daughter, and what has that to do with the buffaloes, and the payment of the interest of the loan?"

"She is young and beautiful. Oh, by the holy prophet how beautiful," and the man closed his eyes as though to see again the fresh young loveliness of the village maiden he had set out to betray.

"A young and beautiful girl. How old is she, my trusty one?" said Abu, rising at once to the bait held out by his wily old messenger.

"Perhaps she is nine or ten years of age, Sahib. Oh those eyes, how they danced like twinkling stars in a summer's sky," and Osman clasped his hands in a transport of ecstasy as he recalled Sundari's radiant face while relating her story to her village companions.

"If she is ten, she is a year older than the lovely Ayesha who proved the pattern of an obedient and virtuous wife," mused the money lender, quite loud enough for his words to fall upon the attentive ears of his servant.

"She is fair as a high born Mohammedan lady, Sahib."

"Dog of a servant," roared out Abu, roused by the remarks from his easy indolence, "what do you know of well-born Mohammedan women who are kept for the eyes of their own lords to feast upon?"

The dog of a servant whined like a whipped puppy, but his heart was too determined on the project he had brooded over, all the wearisome tramp from Lingapura, and so he made another effort murmuring,

"My beautiful lotus bloom, my starry eyed little one I at least have gazed upon thine unveiled beauty."

At the words Abu's eyes blazed with the new-born desire to see and possess such beauty for himself, but he did not will that his servant should know too much, so he quietly replied,

"Ah! I understand, Osman: you are still my faithful friend: two fine fat buffaloes, and a beautiful daughter. Our friend Lingappa is a rich man after all. How much does he owe me?"

"Eighty rupees, and a quarter's interest on the debt."

"That will do; bring the lovely child here, and we will cancel the debt."

"Sahib!" there was a world of astonishment in the intonation Osman threw into that one word."

Was he not to be well paid for bringing such a pearl to the money lender's notice? The already rich banker would cancel Lingappa's debt and

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take the beautiful prize while he himself was to be a poor man still. Alas ! alas ! for his own schemes.

“ You may go,” was his master’s reply to the exclamation of the faltering word “ Sahib.” “ You heard my order, go and lay your plans for carrying it out at once.”

Night had fallen while the men talked. The sowcar retired to his evening meal well pleased with himself and his day’s transactions, while his tool, the Mussulman, stumbled along in the darkness to his lowly home. First, he cursed his own fate, and then he took comfort in stolid indifference ; for did not the holy Koran teach that what was to be would be, therefore why worry himself unnecessarily about the accumulation of wealth that perhaps Allah had decreed should never be within his grasp.

IV

THE FAMILY DEBT

WHILE Abu, the money lender, and his servant Osman so cynically discussed the possessions of Lingappa, the carpenter, the poor man was himself passing through a time of bitter anguish. He lay face downwards in the temple, prostrate, first in prayer, and then in rebellion, before the huge stone image of Basavana, the sacred bull. He wrestled with fate, and thought hard things of the deities who were dooming him to days of trial, hunger, and other innumerable hardships.

Ever since the death of his father, two years ago, when besides stepping into the position of village carpenter, he had also inherited the family debt, contracted not by his father, but by his grandfather, everything had gone against him, and now the climax had come in the demand of Osman, the Mussulman, that he should meet the interest due on the family debt, or else sell to the highest bidder the two animals that helped him to earn the necessary grain that barely kept life within him and those dependent upon him. It was seldom that money ever passed through his fingers ; for the villagers always paid him in grain

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or clothes for his work ; and his temple services were repaid by his living, rent and land free.

He hardly knew how he had managed to pay the sowcar's interest during the past two years. One after another of his few possessions, including his wife's jewels, had been sold, and by dint of much economy of his stomach he had endeavoured to save a daily handful of the grain he received as payment for his labours and when this reached a few measures he had sold it, and carefully treasured up the few annas he thus gained, hoping to save enough to meet the sowcar's demands ; but now the time of payment had come, and he was still many rupees short of the required amount.

Day by day the sun blazed fiercely away in his pitiless majesty, and the rain clouds, that every few days looked so promising, scudded across the sky without letting one drop fall on his few lime trees, or on his parched plot where some blades of cholum were valiantly struggling for existence.

Last week he had taken two annas from his small, small savings, and had spent them in purchasing a few jessamine flowers, and a tiny drop of cocoanut oil. Then he had gone the weary round of the fifteen temples that were erected in his village, and had promised a votive offering to each of the fifteen different deities they represented, if a downpour of rain came and saved his small crops.

If the cholum and the lime trees were in good condition, he felt he could persuade Osman to wait, especially if there were the promise of a present for himself in addition to paying his master's interest. But apparently the gods were all indifferent to his cries, for the heavens were like a blazing furnace, and the much-wished-for rain seemed as far away as ever. No miracle had been performed to save poor Lingappa from his crushing anxiety. The pure white jessamine blooms lay crushed and withered before the idol gods, and the wicks in the small oil lamps burned steadily for a while and then flickered out as the oil became exhausted, but the deaf and dumb and blind images remained in their impotence, powerless to render help to the miserable suppliant for their favour.

The man was worn almost to a skeleton, by the privations he had already undergone, and the threatened famine was now really in the land.

Now as he lay in mute supplication before the bull carved in stone, his thin, dirty loin cloth—his solitary garment—could not hide the sparseness of his form, and every breath he drew caused his ribs to stand out in bold relief.

No wonder despair crowded into the man's soul and found lodgment there: for he was hungry with a longing, sickening hunger. No matter how tight he drew his waist cord he could not ease the desperate gnawing that made him feel sick when he even thought of food.

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As far as he knew, the pangs of appetite must be satisfied with thoughts alone for that night at least. "Oh Basavana, Basavana, Shiva, Shiva, Shiva, help, help, have mercy," he moaned aloud. Some mischievous boys at play outside the temple, hearing the voice raised in entreaty, entered, and seeing Lingappa, the carpenter, exclaimed, "Oh Lingappa, does the god not hear you? shall we ring the bells and wake him up?" and without waiting for a reply, they set the bells clanging one after another, and then rushed out again shrieking with laughter at their own joke.

He paid no heed to the interruption; but by and by he dozed off to sleep. His slumbers were not by any means peaceful; for curry and rice, buffaloes, Mussulmans, and his little daughter Sundari were all mixed up in a terrible muddle.

When he roused himself at last to think of going home, the sunset hour had come and gone, and a full moon was shedding a glorious light over the quiet village; for most of its inhabitants were lying curled up in impromptu winding-sheets seeking to sleep. In all sorts of out-of-the-way corners, as well as in exposed spots, the silent figures lay. No thought of danger to themselves, or inconvenience to others disturbed their comfortable attitudes.

It was really just a little cooler outside than in, and it was so easy to spread their mats on the ground as anywhere else. Indeed the great ma-

jority of them dispensed with the luxury of even a mat, and were only too thankful to be free from their daily toil, and thus have the opportunity of reposing on the only resting-place they had ever known—the hard dry ground.

The carpenter paused a moment at his own door, which according to custom stood wide open, and then crossed the threshold, stopped to speak to his buffaloes, and reach them a few handfuls of dry cholum straw for their supper. Afterwards he passed into the second room where in prosperous times his own meal would be awaiting him. He did not expect any food to-night. "Why should he eat?" he thought in a dull way, when so many others in the village were quite as hungry as he was.

Suddenly he came to a standstill and began sniffing the air as though he were trying to scent out some prey. What was it? Yes, it must be, he could not be mistaken, there certainly was curry somewhere about. Where was it?

His head began to swim round, and thousands of sparks seemed flying out of his eyes.

Then he recovered himself as a voice speaking in the darkness fell on his ears, "My mother, when will he come? I am so hungry and want my supper."

"I'm here, my little one. Supper, how I wish I could give you some."

"Father, father," rang out little Sundari's voice in glad accents, "such lovely curry and boiled

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cholum is ready for you and me. Poor mother has the shaking fever again, and cannot eat her share."

"Cholum and curry? where is it? I do not understand."

"Listen, father, Chikka Basamma was at the water-hole, and I told her the fever devil had come to mother, there was no grain to boil, and we had eaten no food since yesterday morning; and she remembered that she had a measure of cholum to spare, and so she cooked it for you and me.

"Be quick, father, and eat as much as you want, and let me have mine."

Eat! Could he eat the food now that it was within his reach? He would try, and then perhaps he would feel better about the buffaloes and the debt.

He took up his little brass chumbu, and poured only a few drops of water over his hands, for the liquid was too precious to use lavishly, and having carried the food out to the house-pial to eat in the moonlight, he took a handful, dexterously rolled it into a ball, and tried to toss it down his dry throat, but it nearly choked him, with the result that he spluttered and coughed violently in his effort to swallow the much-needed nourishment.

Then he thought of his tightened waistcord, and immediately loosened it a few inches. After that he found he could swallow more easily, but

a very little of the cholum moistened by dipping it into the savoury pepper water sufficed him, or perhaps he was thinking of the hungry child still waiting for her share which custom would not allow her to eat until her father was satisfied.

Sundari was too young and irresponsible to be troubled by any scruples about the amount her father had carried within doors and given to her. Although she had shared various scraps with the other children of the village, she was almost famishing, and she set to work heartily to devour her portion of the unexpected meal.

When the first pangs of hunger were satisfied, she thought of her mother, and crept in the darkness to the corner where she lay huddled.

"My mother, eat some supper. I will bring it and put it in your mouth. Perhaps the shaking devil that is in you is hungry too. Give him some food, and see if he will leave off shaking you so much."

"Give me water, water," was the feeble reply. The child found her way into the moonlight and got the chumbu that her father had used, carried it to her mother, and the water that remained in it she poured deftly down her throat.

She felt too frightened of what the darkness might be concealing, to grope her way back to her unfinished supper, and so she threw herself down on the bare floor, by the side of her mother, and was soon sleeping the sweet sleep of healthy Indian childhood.

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Meanwhile her father had settled himself for slumber on the pial outside the house. He unwound his turban, and used it as a covering for his entire body. His physical exhaustion proved greater than his mental weariness, and like Sundari, it was not long before sleep folded her mantle of forgetfulness around him.

The air was oppressively hot ; the moon sailed across the sky in her pale splendour, lighting up the whole village, and revealing all sorts of odd corners, while the fantastic shadows she cast seemed to linger caressingly upon the forms of the dark sleepers.

An hour or two passed by, and then a gentle breeze stirred faintly through the deserted streets, heavy clouds loomed up from the horizon, and spread rapidly over the sky, covering the radiant face of the moon and wrapping the whole village in sudden darkness. Only another few minutes and flash after flash of lurid lightning pierced through the dark masses of stormy clouds, the thunder rolled, and the rain descended in real earnest. How it poured and poured ; every minute the torrents seemed to gain in intensity till the rugged, uneven streets changed their stony character and became streams of flowing water.

The outdoor sleepers were disturbed ; but with their usual stolid indifference, they merely picked up their mats and ran to the shelter of home, temple, shed or any near place of covering.

Lingappa the carpenter, was one of the first to be aroused by the noise of the breaking storm, and he stood in the full enjoyment of the pattering raindrops, as they fell around him, and then in the heavy refreshing downpour, apparently oblivious of the fact that his bare body was exposed to the fury of the elements. Slowly he picked up his turban and wound it mechanically around his head, with but one thought uppermost, as he murmured, "The gods have remembered me, the grain will grow and the buffaloes are saved."

Abdallah, the grain merchant, heard the thunder, smelt the rain, and quickly realized the heavens were opened at last, and the thirsty earth was being refreshed. He listened sleepily, and then settled down even more comfortably than before on his luxurious lounge, and drew solace from the fact that he had reaped a good harvest in rupees through the already long continued drought.

Abu Taleb, too, was conscious of the change in the weather, as he lay half awake and half asleep, haunted by what Osman had told him of the possibility of securing a lovely slave girl for the women's apartments. "Allah is good," was his inward thought. "Now that the rain has come, there will be many customers to-morrow to secure loans that will enable them to sow their grain, but it will be a risky business, and I must have the highest rate of interest."

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The sky cleared, and the storm passed away almost as suddenly as it had come. The moon peeped out, shyly at first, as though ashamed of her tearful appearance, but as the clouds dispersed, her former brilliancy returned, and she once more reigned a queen over the sleeping but refreshed land.

V

A FOREIGN VISITOR

THE English lady to whom Abu Taleb had salaamed in the bazaar was returning home with her two companions from a far distant village where she had lately commenced evangelistic work.

She was a comparatively new recruit to the missionary ranks of Ballapura, and had not yet mastered all the intricacies of the foreign but sweet tongue spoken by the thousands of people by whom she was surrounded. For many years Bible-women, with the senior lady missionary of the station had worked in the bazaars and in the homes of the town itself; but through lack of time, well equipped workers, and the necessary financial help, the scores of villages round about Ballapura had been left untouched, except one or two close at hand where it had only been possible to pay a yearly visit.

When Hilda Roi first arrived in the mission field, fresh, energetic and enthusiastic, her feet began to tread a thorny path, and the thorns pricked hardest, and went deepest just in the very places where she least expected them.

Nearly all her preconceived notions regarding missionaries, mission work, and the "interesting

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heathen" had to be quickly laid on one side as she personally faced the stern realities of mission life. Now that her days of study were almost in the past, and she was stepping out into responsible, if intensely interesting work, she almost shrank from the immensity of the task that confronted her.

As she sat in the carriage on her homeward drive, the object of Osman's hatred, and the subject of Abu Taleb's discourteous remarks, her serene face hid a heart that was almost bursting in its intensity of desire for a sympathetic white friend in whom to confide the experiences that had been the outcome of her afternoon's effort to carry the gospel to one of the heathen villages of heathen India.

What she really wanted was a wise head and a loving heart, one that beat in unison with her own, one that would cheer her onwards, and help her to unravel her tangled missionary skein.

At the moment of Abu Taleb's profound salaam, Hilda was conscious that her heart was crying out for her mother, and it was a fact that at that particular time she did want mothering very badly.

She roused herself to return the salaam of the sowcar, and caught the eyes of her native companions upon her with a pitying look of love and devotion that nearly brought the tears to her eyes; but her natural self-control came to her aid, and she settled herself once more with a de-

terminated air, and gave her arm a very decided pinch through her thin muslin sleeve, and then preached a mental sermon to some one bearing her own name.

“Hilda Roi, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to get so down-hearted, and thoroughly disappointed just because all these people prefer to worship wooden and stone images, and will persist in treating your message with indifference, and occasionally a little ridicule. Remember how many hundreds of years God’s chosen people needed in preparation for the coming of their Messiah, and do you think these poor ignorant superstitious Hindus will be ready to receive Him on the first mention of His precious name. Wanting your mother’s arms round you indeed; longing to hear the sound of her soft sweet voice as in the days you put so resolutely behind your back. What next will you want, I wonder? A nice missionary you are! Where is all the heroism with which you set out from your native land? You have got an idea that this stupendous work of converting the heathen is yours. No wonder you falter by the way, and wish so ardently for an older and wiser brain than your own to counsel you. Rest in Him. The work is His. You deliver your message in the power of the Holy Spirit and leave the cultivation of the gospel seed to Him who can and will cause it to grow up.”

Then she left Hilda to herself, and her thoughts

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wandered off to the parable of the sower, and glancing at the dark glowing faces of her native helpers sitting facing her she gave them an insight into what was passing through her mind by saying, "And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred."

Ruth, the elder of the two girls, was quick to appreciate Hilda's train of thought, but it was with a dreamy far-away look in her Oriental eyes that she replied also in the words of scripture, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." As she repeated the comforting words, her voice kindled into enthusiasm, and a warm glow of gladness overspread her face while she continued: "We shall never regret the effort we have made this afternoon because we went forth to our appointed work in the strength of the Lord, believing that He would bless our feeble attempt. The result looks very barren on our homeward journey, but the future will reveal that which is hidden from us now."

"It has been hotter than usual to-day, and we have been a long way; I am sure Missy must be tired," said Mary, as Ruth paused after administering the very balm of Gilead to Hilda's shrinking heart.

"You must be tired too, Mary. How bravely you and Ruth pushed behind the bandy when the wheels got embedded in the shingle."

"Oh, but Missy held the reins and cheered the pony on," interposed Ruth.

The balm of Gilead had soothed and mollified, and Hilda laughed merrily at the remembrance of the picture they must have made when the rough country pony they were driving came to a stubborn standstill in the wide shingle bed of a river, and they all had to move, because the pony would not. The coachman, or in less dignified language, the horse-keeper and the two women had pushed at the wheels with all their strength, and Hilda had seized the bridle and dragged courageously, to cheer the horse in pulling forward in response to the mighty push from behind.

The incident had delayed them almost an hour on their journey out to a village that they had not before visited.

When at last they did reach their destination, hot, moist, and weary, the whole population of the village including the lower animals turned out to greet them. Scores of pigs grunted themselves to resorts, more dirty than even the entrance to the village; some half dozen donkeys unmusically hee-hawed, and then hobbled slowly away seeking to browse on dry ground, and amongst loose stones, mangy dogs barked and yelped shewing their ferocious teeth till the

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horse-keeper cracked his whip in their midst, and then they dropped their tails, and crawled into some place of safety after the fashion of other ill-conditioned cowards of the same ilk, fowls scattered right and left; the crows caw cawed mockingly, but at a safe distance, and only the human species gathered thicker and thicker, drawn on by the curiosity inherent in Adam's race, to see for themselves what new specimen had appeared so suddenly in their midst.

Men, women, boys, girls, and babies jostled and pushed each other to get but a glimpse of Hilda's white face, and wonderfully strange clothing. They jeered and laughed at each other's remarks, and when Hilda surrounded by scores of half dressed dark skinned people, opened her mouth and essayed to speak, her efforts were drowned in peals of laughter that sounded in the girl's ears wonderfully English. Then one of the Bible women made an attempt, and the hastily gathered audience was a little more attentive to her, for she was one of their own colour, and therefore quite an ordinary mortal, but whatever kind of a being was the other creature?

In the confused babel of sounds the young missionary could make very little out of the village dialect, and presently Mariamma turned to her with an amused twinkle in her bright eyes, and said,

"Dear Missyamma, they want to know if you are a man or a woman."

Hilda had laughed aloud at the perplexity in the minds of the astonished natives, and they seeing and hearing her natural laugh felt a little more easy in their minds. That stray laugh was the touch of nature that made the white woman missionary and the dusky heathen villagers kin, and in a few minutes they became a little more confidential.

"A woman, did you say, Akkamma?" ventured an old widow in the crowd, "then she is a widow too, poor thing, her thali¹ is gone, and she has no ornaments."

"When did your husband die? How many sons have you got?" asked another interested spectator.

"Is your skin white all over? What are your hands and feet like?" queried a third.

A second time Hilda tried to speak, but the sound of the English tongue pronouncing their liquid words was the signal for renewed merriment, and amid the laughter she could hear her words repeated by one and another. So she asked Ruth to explain the object of her visit; but all concerned were too curious about herself to take much heed, and still the three women were hemmed in by the ever increasing crowd that swayed backwards and forwards like the branches of a tree in a gale.

Ruth begged them either to be quiet, or to

¹ A gold ornament worn round the neck, as the sign of wifehood.

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move away so that there might be an opening by which they could return to the carriage.

The pack was at its densest, and the excitement at its height when a man suddenly appeared with a heavy stick grasped menacingly in his sinewy hand. He let out a fierce cry, and flourishing his stick in all directions dealt a few blows that were not exactly light ones.

The man, his weapon, and the method of using it proved very effective, and soon Ruth made her voice heard in explanation of the visit that had caused such intense excitement.

"Our time is gone, and we cannot stay longer to-day. See the shadows are creeping over yonder temple. We had wonderful news to tell you, but you have laughed so much that we must try to come back another time when perhaps you will listen quietly to our words about one True Living God who loves you, and thinks about you, although you do not serve Him, or even know Him," said the gentle native girl.

"Oh, don't go, don't go," pleaded a dozen earnest voices. "We like looking at the white woman. Where did she come from? Do they talk like we do in her land? Oh! how funny to hear such a foreigner talk our language," were the questions and remarks that fell on Hilda's ears.

Gradually they worked their way back to the waiting carriage, and Hilda had to confess that it looked like failure all along the line. She felt it was no comfort to tell herself that the people

were ignorant and superstitious, and that she was the first white woman they had ever seen, and therefore it was natural she should be an object of unbounded curiosity.

All her drive home she was ruminating on the events of the afternoon, and it was the bitter sense of failure that made the wave of homesickness so real to her just as she was nearing the busy streets of the town, but as she talked on with her companions her horizon cleared very considerably, and by the time the mission house was reached, much of her usual brightness had returned.

The native girls alighted from the carriage, and before making their parting salaam one of them said,

“What time shall we come to-morrow afternoon, Missyamma?”

“How far did you say it is to Lingapura?”

“The carriage will take us seven miles, and then we shall have nearly half an hour’s walk.”

“Then we must start quite early; can you be here by two o’clock?”

“Two o’clock? Oh, Missyamma, the sun shines very fiercely at that hour for you to go out.”

“Never mind. We will have the thick cover over the bandy, and with my topee¹ and umbrella I shall be quite safe. How many different villages have we been to now?”

¹ Large pith sun hat.

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"Six, and Lingapura makes the seventh. Missy said we must be content with seven villages for a beginning."

"Have you any idea how many villages there are in our district, Ruth?"

"Far too many to count, Missyamma."

"Have none of them ever been visited by the missionaries or the catechists?"

"Missy forgets how many other places there are: the thousands and thousands of people, and the few who want to tell them of Jesus, our Lord. There are nearly eight hundred people in the little village we have been to to-day and I expect we shall hardly find time to go back again for another three weeks, or perhaps a month."

"Well, remember to-morrow at two o'clock. As there are so few of us we must not be slothful in our business for Jesus."

"Salaam, Ruthamma, salaam, Mariamma," and Hilda raised her right hand to her forehead in true Oriental style.

"Salaam, Missyamma," replied the girls who drew their saris well over their heads and turned homewards to the mission compound which was right in the midst of one of the Pettahs¹ of the town.

They had not gone many steps when a sudden inspiration seemed to seize them and seeing Hilda still on the veranda, they retraced their steps, and with a pleasant smile Ruth said,

¹ Divisions.

"Dear Missy, we think if you would let us put some glass bangles on your wrists it would be a help in our work. You would then be wearing something the same as we do, and it might prove a bond between you and the village women. You see if you only had the same sort of bangles on, you would not be entirely different from ourselves."

The suggestion appealed to Hilda at once, and she said, "It is a capital idea, bring me some to-morrow, and you shall put them on. Only remember they must be large. I don't want my hand screwed into all sorts of shapes like the girls have theirs when the bangle man comes round."

Again Hilda was alone, and still she stood absorbed in thought until aroused to the necessities of Indian housekeeping by the soft tones of the bhoi¹ addressing her and saying,

"Kerosene all finished, Ma."

As she turned to go inside, to get her store-room keys, and so relieve the bhoi of his anxiety concerning the kerosene, a piercing shriek rang through the compound, and Hilda knew one of the orphan girls under her care had got into trouble of some description. Before a minute had elapsed the patter of bare feet sounded on the concrete floor of the veranda, and three excited voices all began to speak at once.

¹ Head servant in an English home in India.

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Hilda put her hands to her ears to shut out the babel made by the three foreign tongues, and the children, quick to note the signal, left off talking while one of them explained that a big black scorpion had stung Nilamma in her heel, and they wanted some ammonia to rub on her foot.

“Run quickly, and say I am coming at once,” said Hilda calmly, and going to her medicine chest she picked up the bottle containing the ammonia and sped across the compound to where the girls’ home was built.

She found the little sufferer surrounded by her companions. Two of them held her leg in a tight grasp to keep the poison from ascending, and some others were supporting her head and body, while she herself moaned most piteously from the terrible pain she was suffering. Hilda knelt by the child’s side, and tenderly picking up the poor little foot commenced to rub the ammonia into the place that had been stung, but it was nearly an hour and a half before the pain grew less or the moans of the little victim began to abate.

VI

HER CHILDREN BY ADOPTION

HILDA ROI was the youngest daughter of a small family, and had naturally come in for a good deal of care and attention from her elder sisters as well as from her father and mother, so that it was an entirely new experience for her when at the close of her first year of missionary life she found herself in the responsible position of "mother" to forty or fifty orphan and destitute girls whom the workers under the London Missionary Society stationed at Ballapura, had felt called upon to rescue from time to time.

During the few months these girls had been under her care, she had grown to love her dark-eyed charges, and to feel the responsibility of the name by which they called her. Her children varied from four years of age, the baby of the home—right on to the marriageable maidens of fourteen, fifteen and sixteen.

It was no light task that had been assigned to her, to feed, clothe, educate and shelter so many girls upon the slender contributions sent by friends who had the missionary interest at heart.

The calls upon her time and attention were

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innumerable, and as she turned away from ministering to the scorpion's little victim she wondered how many more times she would be summoned that night, and she sighed involuntarily as she confessed to herself that it really was hot.

As she crossed the compound, she cast anxious glances towards the rainy quarter of the sky, but not the faintest speck of a cloud was to be seen.

"When will the rain come?" she murmured. "If it would only pour like it does at home, just for a few hours, this stifling heaviness would pass away, and I for one should feel better, I am sure."

As she stepped on to the broad shady veranda of the mission house, the bhoy stood, apparently waiting her return. Even the flutter of his white loin cloth, and the set of his gold-bordered turban betokened the consciousness of his own importance, as he gave the customary salaam, and said with an air of knowing the thoughts that were passing through his mistress's mind,

"The rain clouds are far distant. There is little grain in the bazaar. Many poor people are hungry. The Dhorasani's servants have not enough sombla¹ to pay their debts."

"I quite understand, bhoy, that you mean you want me to increase your wages because the price of grain has gone up."

¹ Wages.

The bhoy folded his hands together, raised them to his face, and salaamed respectfully ere he replied :

“ The English Dhorasani has great wisdom ; she reads the profoundest secrets of a poor servant’s heart.”

“ Well, Jacob, I must think over what you have said, and see what can be done for such poor sufferers as you and the other servants.”

The well-favoured house-bhoy did not detect any irony in Hilda’s reply, and now that he was relieved of the burden of asking for the increase in his wages, which he did not need, he volunteered a little further information. “ The people in the district are in great distress ; in many villages they are only getting one meal in two days. To-morrow there is to be a procession, and fireworks, in honour of the goddess Mariamma to try and get her favour with the god of rain.”

“ But if the people have not got the money to buy rice, how can they afford to spend it in fireworks ? ”

“ They will sell their jewels to the sowcars. Fireworks can easily be got, but who can make rice and cholum, tamarind and limes grow when the ground is parched and hard as a rock because the clouds hold the rain instead of letting it fall where it is more needed. When the Dhorasani pays her poor servants more wages, they can go to Abdallah, the grain merchant, and pay him

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the increased price for the rice he has stored up."

"That is all very well for my poor servants, Jacob, but what about the village people? Who will increase their pay that they may buy food and live?"

The bhoys' volubility had apparently come to an end for the time being, and Hilda seeing his hesitation said, "After dinner, bhoys, you can carry my chair on to the roof; perhaps it will be a little cooler there."

The heat intensified, and the atmosphere seemed to grow heavier and heavier, as Hilda made a pretence of having some dinner. The punkah swung to and fro with a lazy swish, swish, that did not cause a breath of air in the heated room.

Suddenly there was a thud against the wall, and with a wild convulsive movement the punkah stopped its slow regular beat as the boy who was pulling it let the rope slip from his relaxed fingers, and he himself fell heavily forward, fast asleep at his post.

The fall woke him up, and he made a sleepy, surprised effort to regain the punkah rope; but Hilda had risen from the table, glad of the diversion of the broken rope for an excuse to leave the dinner that was so unpalatable in the burning atmosphere. Standing on the veranda she watched the moon rising above the horizon like a thing of life, so rapidly did it change from

the tiny rim of light just peeping above the line where earth and sky appear to meet, to the full round orb of night.

The bright moonlight tempted her to step down from the veranda and to commence to walk slowly across the compound. As she walked she drew a letter from her pocket and read once again by the silvery rays of the tropical moon, an account of a children's party that her own nephews and nieces in the dear homeland had attended. She put the letter away, and tried to think how much some Christian mother must have spent on her well-fed darlings to give that one supper party to a number of other equally well-favoured children. Perhaps five, or more likely ten pounds. True, the children had been very happy for the few hours they were together, and they had feasted on quantities of rich, indigestible food ; some of them had gone to bed and fought through the horrors of nightmare, and some of them had suffered from a severe bilious attack the next day, and bitter medicine had followed the sweetness of the previous feasting.

The money had gone into circulation. Some one's purse was all the lighter for it ; a few children the more miserable, and a few mothers or nurses a little the more worried on account of their fretful charges—and the children of darkened India were slowly starving to death on a handful of grain every two days or so. She had

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got thus far in her meditations when her attention was arrested by what she took to be a thick coil of rope lying a few feet in front of her—almost across her pathway. She advanced one step nearer and the rope gave a wriggle that caused a thrill of horror to pass through Hilda's overwrought body, and the next instant an angry hiss confirmed her fear that she had almost trodden on a huge snake.

Was it a fleeting moment, or was it an hour that fright chained her to the spot while the venomous reptile glided into the dry prickly pear hedge. Hilda never knew, but as the creature disappeared, she fled towards the house with an energy that utterly defied heat and languor, and raising her voice with no uncertain sound she summoned the servants, with sticks and other weapons of defence, to search for the unwelcome intruder. Of course they did not find it, and could not find it, but the milkman who joined in the search, with a great display of vigour, assured one of the other men that, "that fine, big snake had been living in the Dhorasani's hedge many weeks, and that a widow from his village placed milk for it to drink every day."

After the fright she had experienced, and the exertion she had made, Hilda was thankful to climb the stone steps that led to the house-top and to throw herself into the big basket chair that she found ready for her.

How silent everything was! She almost fancied that she could hear her heart beat.

How vast the vault of heaven appeared with its millions of twinkling stars paling before the greater brilliancy of the full moon. Even the usual indications of the myriad insect life seemed to grow fainter and fainter in the breathless atmosphere that was heavy with the pent up heat of the day.

Perhaps she was growing drowsy, for the hum of the children's voices in the home close at hand seemed a long way off, and the constant tinkle of the bell in the heathen temple that was only in the next compound, fell upon her ears with the muffled sound that distance lends.

And what strange pictures were coming and going with the twinkling of the stars!

Was that an ivy covered church tower with the polar star shining steadily over it?

Why yes, it must be her own church that she used to attend when she was a girl at home, and hark! there was a sound of singing. She half raised herself from her lounge-chair to catch the words:

"The least we do for Jesus
Will be precious in His sight."

Over and over again the congregation seemed to be repeating the two lines like a chorus. And now her vision grew clearer, and she could see right inside the church. Oh dear, how comical

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it all was, and she laughed softly to herself as she saw a man taking round a collecting plate, and the gayly dressed ladies dropping three-penny pieces into it from their expensively kidded fingers. She could hear quite distinctly the mean little jingle the tiny coins made, and paused in her observations to wonder if it were possible for three-penny pieces to blush at the various uses they were put to.

But her attention was wandering, and she wanted to find out what her friends were doing in the old church she knew so well.

Why, it must be a missionary meeting, for there was a large diagram of India hanging in front of the pulpit; how terribly black the great map was except just here and there where the twinkling lesser lights made tiny white spots.

Another transformation, and the stars joined in procession and marched out of church, and some of them formed into groups from which came words of gay talk and happy laughter.

"Don't forget the picnic to-morrow. The railway ticket is only two shillings, first-class fare," came a voice that seemed to belong to the man in the moon. "If the rain holds off, we shall have a delightful day, and the cost will not exceed five shillings each." "How many are joining us?" chorused the seven sisters of Pleiades. "We expect quite fifty," nodded out solemn old Orion.

How those stars would persist in changing and

revealing fresh pictures every moment to that fanciful brain on the flat-roofed bungalow in Central India!

Quick, why there is old Mr. Thomas, the white-haired treasurer of the church, counting over the collection.

"I'll count it again to be sure it is right," he murmured. "Two pounds, nine shillings and four and one-halfpence, I'll make it up to three pounds. I can do without my new umbrella for another month anyhow. There must have been a hundred and fifty people here to-night—less than fourpence ahead, and our young folks are off to that expensive picnic to-morrow."

The church vestry faded away, and the stars began tumbling about in a most indecorous fashion for such ancient works of creation, until they assumed the likeness of thousands of tiny fairy lamps resolving themselves into letters and words and then sentences.

"If our least is also our greatest, it will indeed be precious in His sight."

The glowing illuminated words hurt the eyes of the loungee on the cane chair, as she continued gazing at them, and with a guilty start of one caught sleeping she roused herself up and rubbed her eyes, rose from her seat, took a few turns up and down the roof, and finally made a detour to her room, slipped through a window, and prepared to lie down: but soon her thoughts ran riot again.

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"It is far too hot to sleep. It was almost unbearable outside, and it is really a hundred times worse in this stifling room. I'll take a drink of water and really make an effort to get off to sleep." She crossed the room to where the cooja of water stood, picked it up to pour the water into the glass, but instead of the expected water, with a slippery splutter, out came a frog, that seemed very astonished to find itself in such close quarters, and so unexpectedly disturbed from the delicious cool immersion that it must have been enjoying for hours. "I don't think I shall relish the frog's bath water to drink," said Hilda to herself, "so I'll just lie down and close my eyes with stern determination."

She suited the action to the word, crept beneath the mosquito curtains, and made a valiant attempt to woo "nature's sweet restorer." She closed her eyes again and again, but they seemed to open without any exercise of will power, and whether open or shut, the small meshes of the mosquito nets would assume the most fantastic shapes imaginable, and there she lay quite against her will watching the ever-varying forms and figures that came and went with lightning rapidity.

In a few minutes she forgot the heat, and her effort to sleep in spite of her surroundings: she forgot the fact that she was enclosed within mosquito curtains, as her interest was aroused in the certainty that there were human faces framed in

every little round mesh. Ah! now they were clearer and she could see plainly that they were the faces of Hindu widows. In another second they began to move with a steady movement round and round the bed. Oh! what crowds there were, little and big, young and old, but all with the impress of India's widowhood upon them. Some of them had let their saris fall from their heads revealing their shaven hideousness; others had barely a rag to wind round them, to cover the emaciated state of their poor bodies.

From the little girl, right on to the old woman who had spent years of married life with her lord and master, all were stripped of their jewels, disfigured and made repulsive looking with their shaven heads, clad in the scantiest of garments, and shewing faces dull and hopeless with the pent-up misery of their darkened lives. On, on they went with almost military precision, in a never ending procession. Hilda tried to count them but they came in such bewildering multitudes that her task was hopeless. She tried to stretch out her arms to lay the touch of sympathy upon them, but they hung like leaden weights by her side. She tried to speak but the words that were in her heart would not make themselves heard.

"My sisters, I long, oh, how I long to help you and brighten your lives with a little of earth's blessed sunshine. Jesus the Friend of women, loves you and cares for you. I'll teach

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you how to come to Him for relief from your burdens inflicted not by God, but by men who frame their laws out of hearts corrupted through their evil conceptions of the deity."

"There are too many of us!" came the pitiful answer to the unspoken thoughts. "You are only one, and there are millions of us. Those coming up behind can't catch the faintest echo of your voice. It is only a few of us quite near that can hear."

"Come over and help us," clamoured loudly the child wives, the miserable, frail girl mothers, the gosha women of high degree shut up in the thousands of harems throughout the land, the beautiful dancing girls attached to the idol temples, and given over to the vices of the priestly servitors in whose train they followed. "Come over and help us," demanded the famishing ignorant children that swarmed like ants over all the land. "Come over and help us," came the winning gentle accents of the Heavenly Friend of the weary and heavy laden ones of all the earth.

Surely the room was growing darker, for suddenly the dreary forms of the millions of widows, and the beckoning fingers of the desperate pleaders for help, melted away, and as they disappeared a flash of lightning lit up the room as with sudden electricity, and then loud peals of thunder followed till the bungalow vibrated with the sound.

Hilda sprang from her bed as flash succeeded flash, threw open the door on the balcony and in a few seconds was intently watching a clouded sky.

Another flash, a loud report, and oh! such a lovely, delicious smell of rain. Another minute and a soft patter, patter fell on her strained ears, the softness of the falling rain-drops grew louder and louder, and oh! thank the Lord, yes, it was really raining, and raining in good earnest, not a passing shower, but a heavy refreshing down-pour. The girl stood watching like one mesmerized, as though the falling rain was perhaps only a part of her night's visions too; but by and by a beautiful cooling sense of refreshment crept over her: she could breathe better, and the oppression seemed lifted from her head and mind.

She looked at her watch. Four o'clock in the morning. There were yet two hours before chota hazari.¹

Again she threw herself on her bed, and as though by magic, the music of the rain-drops had banished visions, fancies, dreams—nay the stern realities of the missionary's life into oblivion, and Hilda slept peacefully in that land where the sons and daughters of men walked amidst darkness that was as the shadow of death.

¹ Early breakfast.

VII

“GODS WHICH SEE NOT, NOR HEAR,
NOR KNOW.”

JUST a short drive over the railway lines, through the narrow evil smelling streets of the bazaar, and they had reached the white road that stretched for miles through the bare rocky country of the Ballapura district. There had been an attempt made by a beneficent government to plant trees on each side of the road, but nature alone was responsible for the fact that trees would not flourish in the hard rock bound soil where they were vainly trying to find a congenial home; so instead of the desirable shady avenue of trees there was just the gaunt spectre of what would be trees if they could.

“Billy,” the mission pony was in a good temper, and possessed the mind “to go,” so that the seven miles between Ballapura and Lingapura were accomplished in less time than usual on the afternoon of the day following the storm, when Hilda and her two faithful companions set out to make their first visit to Lingapura, the village of idols and many deities.

When Billy was determined to go his own pace, the horse-keeper knew by experience it

was the better part of valour to let him have his own way; and experience also taught the occupants of the cart that shaking, jolting, and sudden lurches into each others' arms were to be considered as trivial incidents by the way.

There was always a sense of wild exhilaration in riding behind Billy because he belonged to that uncertain class of animals which might be deemed untrustworthy, in so much that he might accomplish his task satisfactorily to himself instead of to those in authority over him: his own little jokes consisted in many unexpected manœuvres. Sometimes they found vent in standing perfectly still, or in suddenly starting forward and in spinning round and round after the fashion of a humming top, or perhaps in backing precipitately into a wide ditch overgrown with prickly pear, and possibly sheltering a few snakes.

But to-day he bounded forward, and never paused until his seven miles were accomplished, and the horse-keeper drew him up covered with white foam, and panting with the exertion of his mad gallop.

“Rub him down well, horse-keeper, and take him out of the shafts until we return,” said Hilda, as she with Ruth and Mary prepared to walk across the burning ground to find out the village that was supposed to be sheltering at the base of some isolated rocks that rose majestically from the low level of the surrounding country.

For a time the three women walked on in

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silence, and then Ruth said, with a smile that revealed a full set of shining teeth with the slightest suspicion of pink upon them as the result of her afternoon betel,

“Billy was a very good pony to-day.”

“Yes, indeed, he brought us along splendidly. The rain has put new life into him, as well as giving us some fresh energy.”

“Who was the Mohammedan we passed just before we came to the river bed? Did you recognize him, Ruthamma?”

“Yes, Missyamma, that was Osman, Abu Taleb’s emissary. He often follows the Biblewomen while they are at work in the bazaar, and tries to argue with them out of the Koran: and sometimes their quiet time with the women in their homes is quite spoilt.”

“I hope you and Mary will never allow yourselves to be drawn into open argument with a man of that kind. Such public disputations do far more harm than good. Any of the missionaries are quite willing to talk upon religious subjects in their own homes with those who really desire to know the truth of our Christian teaching.”

“Oh, yes, Osman always tries to say things about our religion to make people laugh, and then as soon as he has awakened their admiration for his own cleverness he begins to expound passages from the Koran.”

At this point the conversation ceased, for the

difficulties of the way were increasing, and it was all the three women could manage to do to pick their way in single file over the boulders and between the clumps of prickly bushes that throve splendidly in spite of long drought and barren soil.

They had been walking on for quite half an hour in silence, when Hilda stopped to readjust her topee; and to ask, “Is it much further? We appear no nearer to the big rock than we did ten minutes ago.”

“I think we shall soon see some of the outer walls of the village now, dear Missy,” said Ruth in an encouraging tone. “Look, a few steps further there is an idol shrine, so we must be getting nearer the houses.”

“We heard there were fifteen different temples and idols in Lingapura, and I suppose this is one of them, set up by the way to guard the approach to the village,” added Mary, who was struggling on in the rear.

Before arriving in India, Hilda had heard much of the magnificence of the temples of the land. The very word temple carried with it an idea of stately splendour, and so it came to pass that in company with other awakenings she had experienced many a rude shock upon hearing such structures as the one now before her dignified by the name of “temple.”

Of architectural beauty there was none. At the foot of a stunted tree which seemed to spring suddenly out of the ground, and to live on in

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lonely state, a few bamboo rods had been placed in an upright position something after the fashion of scaffolding ; other rods, sticks and dried leaves had been placed to form a roof for the impromptu little building, and beneath the roof, ranged in a row at the very foot of the tree were seven upright stones, the three larger ones in the middle of the line being flanked on each side by two smaller ones. Upon each stone there was a large dab of reddish paint.

To the front of the row of stones, but well to the right stood a fairly large flat piece of granite, and on it rested a round flat dish containing a few dregs of cocoanut oil, while scattered before the stone representations of their deity were the remains of offerings from the devotees, in the form of dried jessamine blooms. The visitors peeped into the shrine to see if there was a poo-jaree about to direct them on their way, but the place was left to silence and desertion ; and so they continued their journey beyond the sacred tree, and along the road that began to widen out a little and so looked more inviting. Another five minutes of struggling on, and a second temple was reached. Here the worker in stone had been employed, and the result of his handicraft was seen in a stone building, if a three sided place can be called a building. This was fifteen to sixteen feet high with perhaps a breadth and length of between three and four feet.

A few rough blocks of stone formed steps up

to the exposed entrance of the place, and Hilda expressed the wish that they should all sit down on these steps to rest, and obtain what little benefit they could from the shade of the stone walls.

Within the temple were three upright granite slabs, two of them having a snake carved upon them, and the third showed the entwined figures of two snakes like a chain. All the slabs were hung with withered flowers worked into wreaths, that shewed grotesquely against the background of gaudy red and yellow paint.

But time was too precious to allow much loitering by the way, and soon the toilsome walk was renewed, and after completing another half mile or so of rough travelling the desired village came into view. The entrance was guarded by two temples far more pretentious in appearance than those already passed. In them were huge images of Basavana, the bull sacred to the worship of Shiva the destroying power of the Hindu Triad. Temples, images, houses all presented such a dirty neglected appearance that in after years Hilda always thought of Lingapura as the dirtiest place she ever visited.

“At last, Mary, we have really reached our destination. I began to wonder if you had been misinformed about the place.”

“Look, Missyanamma, there is the Mussulman,” came the unexpected answer. “He must know of a short path to the village, for we passed him long before we came to the river bed.”

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"Yes, and here come the 'city fathers' to enquire the object of our visit. You better speak first, Ruth, and I will follow," said Hilda, as five or six men appeared from the shadow of a doorway and looked very much as though they objected to the presence of three strange women.

"Salaam, Aiyar," began Ruth, giving the ordinary salutation, but only two men of the company made any attempt to return the greeting.

"May we come into the village and talk to the women and children for a little while?"

"Who is the white woman?" was the reply. Hilda thought her opportunity to speak for herself had come, and so she said:

"I have come a long way to see your women and children, because a Friend who loves me well is very much interested in them too, and has sent me to give them a message from Himself."

"She knows our language," said one man to another, "shall we let her in?"

"See, she wears bangles like our women, but the rest of her is altogether wrong," said another, quite ignoring the fact that Hilda understood these side remarks.

"How many rupees will you give us, if we listen to your message?" chimed in a dirty unclothed worshipper of Vishnu.

"We cannot buy nor sell that which we have come many miles to tell you. The day is hot, and we have walked far. We are feeling tired. May we sit down for a while under the shadow

of this temple?” and without waiting for permission Hilda sat down, while her two companions, like a faithful bodyguard, stood on each side of her: but Indian village courtesy could not allow such a proceeding, and at a signal from one of the men a woman came forward with a rough, dark grey blanket in her hand, and spread it upon the stone steps of the temple to form a more luxurious seat for the visitors.

Hilda had long since learned to accept the inevitable with regard to the Kamblis¹ thus provided. She infinitely preferred dirt she could see to the dirty mysteries that the colour of the profured blanket so effectually hid.

Apparently the news of the new arrivals soon spread through the village; for gradually the little knot around the three women increased until there must have been some twenty to thirty curious pairs of eyes fixed upon them.

Meanwhile Hilda was calling to her aid all the Kanarese she was mistress of, to chat away pleasantly to those nearest to her, and others further away were straining eyes and ears to catch all that was passing. Last night's rain; its effect upon the price of grain; the possibility of being able to plough in two days' time if the rain fell again, and various other items came in for comment.

Still the crowd kept gathering, and filling up the open space, and what a crowd it was to the interested onlookers! Old men, tottering on the

¹ Native blankets.

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verge of the grave, their dirty brown faces lined and seamed with more than care and anxiety. Young men in the first flush of their youth and vigour, yet with the stamp of their degraded lives plainly visible—men who ought to have been following the plough, planting, sowing, and reaping, but who were passing their days in idleness and sin, waiting for the rain to make their forced daily tasks possible. Women of all ages; girl mothers with their unclothed babies upon their hips; wretched, childless wives dying with self-imposed hardships to win the favour of the gods to grant them a son; children in all stages of undress and no-dress, teasing, fighting and generally squabbling with each other. Boys in the early stages of smallpox; others just recovering. Men, women and children, with bloodshot, streaming eyes, proved a strong attraction for the thousands of small black flies that seemed greedily imbibing the sickening matter that oozed from the diseased eyes of the sufferers.

It was no use speaking to a few now, for the audience had arrived, and that apparently without any effort, so Hilda paused for a second before striking a few chords on her concertina and singing in the musical language of her listeners,

“Art thou weary, art thou languid,
Art thou sore distressed?
Come to Me, saith One, and coming
Be at rest.”

The Bible-women joined in the singing, and as they proceeded with verse after verse of the lovely hymn, a solemn stillness settled down over that strange, ignorant, diseased, heathen crowd.

The music, the singing, the singers seemed to exercise a strange fascination over them, and even the children who had been so restless a few minutes earlier, settled themselves into comfortable, listening attitudes.

At the conclusion of the hymn, there was only a moment's pause, for Ruth knew her opportunity too well to let it slip by, and in words suitable to her hearers she simply but graphically explained the meaning of what had just been sung.

"She is talking about a new Swami," said a voice in the front of the crowd.

"What is the name of your Swami?" called out some one a little further away.

"Where does he live? How do you do pooja to him?" asked others, barely giving the speakers time to answer one question before propounding the next.

The missionary and her two helpers forgot the fatigue of their journey, and the distance they must travel before reaching home, in the pleasure of answering the crude questions put to them, and in seeking to bring the light of the gospel to the darkened minds around them, until they were all startled by a cry, "The buffaloes are coming," and in imitation of their audience, they rose quickly to make room for the fierce horned

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creatures that demanded the whole breadth of the street for their own use. Then it was, they noticed the sun had dipped behind the rock at the foot of which the village nestled, and remembering their homeward journey they reluctantly prepared to leave the people who had listened so intelligently.

Many were the salaams returned to them by the villagers at their parting, and one of them on behalf of the others gave them a warm invitation to return at an early date.

With stately dignity he said, "in this village we worship all the gods we know of. The one you have been telling us of seems different from those we already know. We would like to worship Him too, if you will show us the way. The words you have spoken are good words. Come and tell them to us over again." The three women had entered the village silently and alone, not at all sure of the reception that awaited them, but they were not allowed to depart in a similar style, for quite a procession followed them at a respectful distance, until they were well past the temples that stood in such grim guardianship over the entrance of the village. As they were striking out into a path leading to the left, one man came forward, and with much salaaming offered to guide them on to the main road by the shortest path.

Only too glad to be saved the extra walking, they accepted his proffered kindness, and soon

found themselves at a point two miles distant from where the bandy had been left.

Their guide saw no difficulty in this, but when Ruth explained the dilemma they were in, he set off at a sharp trot to summon the horse-keeper who was lying sleeping soundly in the carriage all unconscious of the flight of time.

"That man has a good face," said Hilda. "There is not the same demoralized expression on it as many of the village men betray, but he is dreadfully thin."

"We have had a good time, Missy, have we not? the people were very interested. I believe there is prepared ground in Lingapura for the planting of the gospel seed."

"I noticed the man who guided us here, never took his eyes off you, Ruth, when you were telling how Jesus was able and willing to give rest to burdened and anxious ones."

"Osman the Mussulman, was hovering on the edge of the crowd all the time. His restless eyes were wandering here, there, and everywhere as though trying to pick out some special one," said Mary.

"Did you notice a pretty little girl that tried to get close to Missyamma, and find out where the music came from?"

At this point Billy appeared in the distance, galloping over the road with feet that were either willing or frolicsome, none of the watchers could quite determine which.

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It was with difficulty the horse-keeper reined him in, and persuaded him to stand still while Hilda and the two native women climbed to their seats.

The man who had saved them a long walk back to the highway still lingered, and then fearful that the pony should start off on its mad gallop once more, hastily produced from a fold of his turban a small withered lime, and bowing low, held it out at arm's length as an offering to Hilda.

"Thank you very much, Appa ; I shall always remember your kindness to us to-day. I hope we shall soon meet you again. What is your name ?" said Hilda kindly.

"I am Lingappa, the village carpenter," was his answer, but Billy was impatient and would wait no longer, before giving a few preliminary jumps, turns, and kicks in order to work himself up to the point of starting.

VIII

OSMAN'S SUCCESS

THE visit of the English lady to the village of Lingapura caused a flutter of excitement that lasted for a few hours only, amongst the majority of those who had gathered to hear her speak. Only with few did it make any lasting impression, and of these few perhaps Lingappa, and his little daughter Sundari were the two who were to be the most influenced in the years to come by the message of peace and love that had reached their ears for the first time that sunny afternoon. Sundari's sharp eyes had detected the dreaded form of the Mussulman as he hovered on the edge of the crowd that had listened entranced to the gospel story for nearly two hours, and instead of following in the train of the other children as they rushed pell-mell out of the village to see the last of their unexpected visitors, she slipped quietly into her father's house to escape an encounter with her enemy, for so she instinctively felt Osman to be. Gradually the crowd that had collected at a moment's notice, melted away. Most of the women set to work to prepare such food as was within their limited means ; a few turned towards the well for

their final chatty of water, and Osman being left conspicuously alone looked around for Lingappa his victim ; but not seeing him, he crossed the narrow street and was soon at the door of the carpenter's house.

He glanced through the open doorway, but the whole place seemed enshrouded with gloom ; then he coughed authoritatively, not the low subdued cough that he affected to attract his master's attention, still even that sign of his near presence brought no response, so he lifted up his voice and gave the customary signal of the arrival of a visitor by calling out in his loudest tones, " Amma, Amma," for he judged the master of the house must be absent.

Sundari's mother still lay in a huddled heap weak from the effects of her attack of fever on the previous day, and faint for want of some nourishing food. Sundari crouched in the little cook room whither she had hastily fled as she heard the first sound of that warning cough on the threshold, and neither woman nor child gave any answer to the Mussulman's demand for admittance.

The one kept silence through fear, and the other through indifference.

The Mussulman had kept his eyes pretty well on Sundari all the afternoon, and he felt quite sure he had not been deceived as to whom the pretty rounded limbs, and the torn sari belonged when he noted her hasty retreat at the conclusion

of the street preaching, and he also felt equally sure that she had not come out of the house again, so as she was the object of his search he followed his cry of, " Amma, Amma," by walking boldly into the darkened room.

Coming suddenly out of the bright sunshine, the gloom of the house seemed deeper than it really was, and Osman had reached the few stone steps leading to the inner apartment before he was aware of their existence; the result was a sharp collision between a pair of brown legs scantily protected by white muslin pants, and the smooth edge of the well worn steps. The poor man appeared to try a new acrobatic feat but his attempt at falling up ended in a most ungraceful sprawl, and a sharp cry of pain as he realized much damage had been done to his shin bones.

With difficulty he gathered himself together and sat down on the dirty floor regardless of his spotless muslin undergarments, and began to think over his position if he should fail in his plans.

He had worked his scheme out beautifully even to securing the services of two bullock drivers and their bandy to await his return at a given isolated spot between Ballapura and Lingapura, and into that waiting bandy he had fully determined Sundari should go.

A bullock cart carelessly covered with thick sheeting so that the Mohammedan women were well concealed from all curious eyes was such a

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common sight in and around Ballapura that none would dream of stopping him and making disagreeable enquiries. He meant to deliver the girl over to his master that night, and receive from his hands the receipted discharge of Lingappa's debt, and after that the rest would be easy.

If he gained no more out of the scheme he would have at least the two buffaloes as his perquisite. He did not suppose Lingappa would make any fuss over the disappearance of his daughter. One Hindu girl more or less was of no account. If any talk were made he would suggest some evil spirit had decoyed her away, and that would be quite enough to arouse their superstitious fears.

He would keep the receipt for the discharge debt, while he still held the debtor in his own power extorting interest from him as long as he could. Then in the end when it was impossible for the man to pay any more he would seize his few possessions and so enrich himself.

"The sowcar can have the girl: he will soon tire of her. She will probably fade away, and grow ugly with her life in the harem, and I shall have the best of the bargain after all," he had concluded as he formulated his plans for the abduction of the child.

He had made an early start from Ballapura that morning, and had haunted the water-hole in the hope that Sundari would appear, and that a

favourable opportunity would occur for picking up her light form and taking her to a place of concealment. When the mission bandy had passed him in the afternoon, he was just on his way to Lingapura after ascertaining that the bullock cart he required was in the appointed place.

It was with the greatest impatience that he had hovered like a bird of ill-omen on the outskirts of the interested throng around Hilda and the two Bible-women. He cursed the fate that had brought the white faced Englishwoman to mar his plans ; but when the crowd dispersed and left him unnoticed he chuckled inwardly at the thought that a propitious moment had befriended him at last.

But alas ! for the speedy execution of well laid Mussulman plans : those dirty stone steps were exactly in the right place to trip up feet that hastened to do evil.

It was half an hour before the bruised emissary rose from his lowly seat : the gloom had increased, and the stillness was so intense that Sundari ventured to breathe once more, and thought she would try to find out what had fallen down with more than a suspicion of heaviness.

Osman's well trained ear caught the sound of her light footfall, and he held his breath while he braced himself to a mighty effort in case the child should come near him.

" My mother, are you there ? " called Sundari,

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in frightened accents. "Did you hear the noise, what was it?"

"Help, help," cried the Mussulman; "I am hurt, and it is getting dark. I cannot see where to go; help me to rise, and your gods will reward you."

Sundari did not move; for she knew the voice. "Give me some water, or I will call up a thousand devils to torment you."

She heard the threat, and her heart bumped within her at an alarming rate while she reflected, that if the Mussulman were hurt he could do her no harm, and it would be better to give him a drop of water than to be doomed to the awful torments that she had always been taught devils could, and would inflict upon their victims. Her heart gave another wild throb as these thoughts chased each other through her brain, and with a sudden decision she picked up a chumbu of drinking water, and with hasty steps went to the place whence the sound of the man's voice came.

She pushed the water within his reach and moved away, but again the voice tremblingly imploring her to put the refreshing draught to his lips, as his arms were hurt and he could not raise the vessel to his mouth, recalled her, and she felt a thrill of courage at the thought that if the man's arms were hurt, he could certainly do her no harm, and so moved with pity for his sufferings, she took up the chumbu once more,

went down the steps, and held the cool drink to her enemy's lips.

It seemed but the work of a second, as her compassionate little face bent over the fallen man, to press his dirty red handkerchief over her mouth, and throw an arm round her to prevent her escape.

A smothered cry escaped her, as the chumbu fell with a clatter to the ground, and she knew herself to be imprisoned in an iron grip, while the handkerchief smelt, and tasted badly even in that atmosphere of vile odours.

Her cry aroused her mother from the dull lethargy of mind caused by her poor fever-stricken body, but the purport of it did not pierce her benumbed brain, and consequently she made no effort to ascertain the cause of the outcry.

Osman held the child tightly for a few minutes, until he felt her body gradually relax, and then he removed his prepared handkerchief from her mouth and smiled with deep satisfaction at the result of his clever manœuvre. He laid the helpless little body on the ground and stepped outside the door to reconnoitre. His shins were still tender, and would hinder his making quick progress, but the fates were with him so far, and he felt confident they would not desert him at the final moment.

Furtively he gazed up and down the narrow street, and even walked quickly to the next bend to see if the way were clear. Only a woman's

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sari fluttered within a doorway, and with her disappeared the last sign of any human being. Having cultivated the leisurely stately movements of the rich man in imitation of his master, it was difficult for him to hurry his steps, more especially with the pain from his badly damaged shins as a constant companion, but in an incredibly short time he was back again in Lingappa's house and had raised the unconscious Sundari in his arms, and nerved himself to make a dash for concealment.

How beautifully deserted the streets were! for not a soul witnessed his exit through the carpenter's door, down the street, round the first corner, and behind the huge stone image of Basavana in the temple at the front of the village. He laid his limp burden down, and prepared to make himself comfortable for a few hours, deeming that he would be wise not to run the gauntlet of the village until the inhabitants had settled down for their night's rest.

Everything was very quiet, except for the barking of a few stray dogs, and the echo of an occasional footfall from some passer-by, and Osman, knowing that he would be perfectly secure in his resting-place for some hours at least, lay down to rest, but the time passed all too slowly, and as the wick in the little earthen lamp spluttered and flickered, and finally went out, he felt tired of his cramped position, and wished for some supper.

At last the struggling moonbeams found their way into the darkest corners of the temple, and seemed to rest like a benediction upon Sundari's pale brown face, and to search out the man crouching so guiltily behind the huge idol.

"Lucky for me these degraded people worship such monstrosities," soliloquized the refugee. "The broad back of this dumb ox makes a grand hiding-place, but I'll take a look round and see if the way is clear. It is time I was on my journey to Ballapura." Thinking thus, he emerged from his place of concealment, but drew hurriedly back to the friendly shadows as he saw the figure of a man outlined in the temple entrance.

"Only the poojaree come to replenish the lamps," he thought, but nevertheless he drew his breath carefully lest he should betray himself.

"If the child moves now, I shall be found out," was his next thought, and once more he applied his disgusting handkerchief to her pretty little sensitive mouth.

To his dismay, the figure in the doorway did not move, and presently another, and another appeared until some half dozen men seemed to be gathered in conclave over a matter that caused them deep thought.

When all the expected ones had arrived they sat on the ground, and settled themselves to talk, and one of them produced a few green leaves from a fold of his turban, and disclosed some

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delicious bits of betel which he shared with all alike.

They sat in silence for a long time, and Osman felt that he was more of a prisoner than he desired to be. The chewing of the betel so close to him made him think longingly of his own supper awaiting him seven or eight miles distant.

Presently one of the men spoke, but the listening Mussulman could not catch what he said, and only a few disconnected words floated in his direction. Then one voice broke out in great wrath, and Osman heard without any further trouble.

"Why wait for the Dipavali festival? We are starving, and there is plenty of rice in Ballapura. Let us take it next market-day."

"No, no," came in more cautious accents: "there will be crowds in the street of Ballapura on the night of the Dipavali, and Abdallah's grain store is in a dark part of the town: that will be our opportunity."

"Abdallah is powerful, and so is Abu Taleb the sowcar: they will put us in prison if we fail."

"We shall not fail," said another in tones of assurance, "and remember we are dying of hunger, and so are our little ones, while this man has more than enough grain to feed Lingapura for a year. Besides, have you forgotten that we have chosen the festival of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity? She will certainly favour our plans."

"Are all agreed to help in this scheme for despoiling the men who grow fat on our leanness?"

"Yes, yes, yes," came in somewhat faltering accents from the weird group in the moonlight, and then as though that assent finished the business, silence fell once more amongst them, and even as silently as they arrived so they dispersed, all but one who threw himself down in the temple, and his regular breathing soon assured Osman that he must be fast asleep.

The wily schemer congratulated himself that fate was again in his favour; for he had overheard a plot that certainly would be to his advantage to disclose a little later on: but meanwhile he would try and extricate himself from his present surroundings, and so he cautiously stepped forth, took a bird's-eye view around, and satisfied himself that all the village was sleeping. Returning to his hiding-place, he picked up his burden, and sallied forth into the moonlight, stepping carefully over several prostrate, sleeping forms before he struck the short path leading to the main road.

Sundari was thin and light for she had not been over-fed for some months past, and yet the Mussulman found that she became very weighty as he pursued his guilty flight.

He kept casting uneasy glances in all directions fearful lest he was being followed.

Once his heart almost stood still with fear, as he fancied some one was approaching him along

the road he was taking, and indeed he was only just in time to beat a hasty retreat behind some clumps of prickly-pear when a belated wayfarer passed on with weary steps.

"By the holy prophet's beard, it is Lingappa himself," he muttered as he recognized the passer-by. "Allah is good, my schemes still prosper."

He rested awhile longer, to let Lingappa get well out of sight, and again resumed his quick walk towards the appointed rendezvous.

On, on, he went, till with hunger, fatigue, and the weight of the still unconscious child, the perspiration streamed from every pore in his body. But he persevered. The game was too near the winning-point to dream of fainting at the last moment.

He judged it must be long past midnight ere he could hope to reach the bullock cart, waiting for him behind a disused chatram,¹ but he pressed forward and soon had the satisfaction of seeing in the distance the shadow cast by the cart that was to relieve him of his burden.

The bullocks were curled up in the attitude peculiar to their sleeping moments, and the drivers had made themselves comfortable on the straw in the cart, long before Osman appeared ; but a few kicks administered, not by the Mussulman's bare foot, roused the sleepers who quickly hitched in the bullocks, and soon the party were

¹ Rest-house.

moving along in the leisurely style that befitted the occasion.

It was an hour before sunrise ere Ballapura was reached, and Osman decided he must wait for the night to fall before Sundari could be introduced to her new master, so he lifted her out of the cart, and carried her into his own house rejoicing in heart that his plans had matured so far successfully.

IX

THE VOICE OF CONSCIENCE

LINGAPPA stood perfectly still, a solitary figure in the middle of the white road, until the mission Jutka was well out of sight. He strained his eyes as though he would still follow it along the winding way that led to distant Ballapura.

Hilda Roi, in her turn gazed and gazed at the man, longing that she might have lingered yet awhile to talk with him, and hear something of what was passing through his mind; for she fancied there was a beseeching look in his haunted eyes.

Although distance hid him from her view, she could not shut out the vision of him standing there, a poor, abject skeleton of a man, with a mere rag twisted round his waist and loins, the dull hopelessness of his life portrayed in every feature, and his very attitude one of utter despair.

Why was she so strangely attracted by this man? He was only an example amongst many millions, who that very day were struggling for a pitiful existence amidst the thick darkness of heathen India.

Surging, struggling, crowding millions of men,

women and helpless little children with minds enslaved, and lives darkened because of the chains of error, superstition, and idolatry that bound them on every side, tormented with fear of devil and god, worshipping or abusing one or the other as either fear or disgust dictated.

Struggling for physical existence, and never knowing the luxury of being above want, the only relief to which they could look forward was beginning another form of life in the next birth which might be an improvement on their present condition, or might, nay probably would, be something worse than the life they led at present, because they could never be sure of what offended or pleased the millions of deities that held sway over their puny lives.

At last Lingappa moved from where he stood, and turned his steps homeward. He fully meant to reach the village before nightfall, but he felt strangely disinclined for much further exertion, and decided to rest for a time. Accordingly he wandered off the well worn track, and found a spot where he could think without fear of disturbance. But this was a new desire on his part. Why should he want solitude in which to indulge his thoughts, he asked himself. He was not ill, and why he should be sufficiently tired to need a rest was a mystery to him. Had the English Dhorasani cast a spell over him? for it was after listening to her singing and her strange new music that this peculiar new sensa-

tion fluttered within him. At this terrible suggestion he cast a look of fear around. Perhaps after all, she was not an English lady as her native companions had affirmed. Now he came to think the matter over she was not at all like the English judge whom he had seen driving through the streets of Ballapura. If he had not with his own eyes, seen her get into that cart he would have thought her a visitor from Kailasa.¹ Indeed, his object in offering to shew her the short path, had been to see if the earth opened and swallowed her, or if she disappeared through the medium of storm and fire. But she had got into the cart and driven off in a very ordinary way, and had even received with her own hands the lime he had tremblingly offered as he thought she might possibly be an incarnation of the Deity. His fear passed away as he remembered the smile with which his offering had been accepted, and he even experienced a thrill, that he could not have defined as pleasure, when he dwelt on the thoughts that perhaps a revelation had been afforded him to shew the gods still smiled upon his efforts to please them one and all.

But such pleasant thoughts were of short duration, for there was that indefinable something at work within him whispering quite gently but very emphatically that he was wrong in his conclusions, and again he glanced round to see if any one was near, for it seemed as

¹ Heaven.

though the feeling had become a voice which said, "No, no, Appa. She was indeed only an Englishwoman, bearing to you and others a message of the Divine love of the one True Living God: she was not one of the millions of gods you have worshipped so long."

It was not surprising that Lingappa should have grasped something of the afternoon's teaching, for like all other village boys he had attended a pial school, and his mind had therefore received a little training. But it was an entirely new process for him to attempt to reason about what he had heard. Hitherto the words of the Brahman priests had been accepted blindly; but now a new power had unconsciously to himself been awakened in his life.

"Are you experiencing much weariness? Come near unto Jesus, and be at rest, were the words they sang," replied Lingappa to the voice he fancied was speaking to him.

"They said Jesus, the true Incarnation of the Living God, would give rest to the tired people, joy to the sad ones, peace to those worried with cares and anxieties; and when this life was over He would take them to be always with Him in a beautiful place like Kailasa." The man spoke softly, for the voice to which he was responding seemed low and tender. He was glad that he was alone, because he argued if a lot of other people had been near, some others might have heard that sweet voice instead of himself.

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"Come near unto Jesus, and be at rest," echoed again and again in his ears.

"I don't know how to come. I want rest from always paying interest to Abu Taleb, and I get very tired of making offerings in all the temples. There are so many of them: but I never get rest by going to Basavana Genesa, Maha Shesha, and all the others whose names the poojaree knows. It is the priests' business to say those over, and not for me to try to remember. Yes, I'll try this Jesus. One God more or less to worship will not make much difference, but I forgot the people from Ballapura did not say where the shrine of this Jesus was, and how can I worship Him, if I cannot take flowers and fruit to lay before His image?"

"Yes, they told you the shrine was within you."

Lingappa was positive now that some one must be hiding in the bushes, so he rose from the ground to look around him, but he could see no living creature, and yet as he resumed his lowly seat, the words came again more distinctly than before.

"Yes, they told you the shrine of Jesus was within you."

He moved away without attempting to reply, determined to continue his homeward journey, but the spell of the vast solitude descended upon him, and seemed to compel him to linger yet by the way; and even when he had walked quite a

mile from his first resting-place, he could not get away from the impression that some one was talking to him.

"The shrine of Jesus, the Rest-giver, is within you."

"Within me, within me," and he came to a standstill in utter consternation as the meaning of the words forced themselves upon him.

"Our priests consecrate the shrines, and the images we make to Vishnu, Shiva, Krishna, Durga, Lakshmi, and all the others, and then the spirits of the gods come and dwell in them, but they never spoke to me like this one does. Within me! If the shrine is there, then the god must be there too. I can't see or feel any shrine, but I can hear the voice."

He had never before reasoned in such a manner; but at that moment conviction entered the soul of whose existence he had never so much as heard, and he knew certainly that the voice with which he had been communing, was a supernatural one.

Having reached this point of conviction, to say that he was frightened, does not express by one iota the awful fears that assailed him. He put his hands to his ears to shut out, if possible, the sound of the voice, but try as he would, it was there, it was within him, and he could not get away from it. He forgot his debt, his lime trees, his buffaloes; he forgot Osman, the Mussulman, his desire for a son to succeed him as village car-

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penter ; he forgot the threatened famine, and his own starving condition ; and he forgot his promised vow to make extra offerings if the rain would only fall. He forgot everything in his overwhelming anxiety to get away from himself, and that low, soft voice within him.

Over and over again he assured himself that the voice was a new torment for his listening to the words of the strangers that afternoon : all the deities were offended, and they had sent one of their number to live inside him, and he would always be hearing the talking : no one else would hear it, only he was doomed to this punishment. The part he could not understand was why rest, peace, joy, and heaven should be the subjects upon which the voice kept talking. The stern Shiva would never speak like that, for he delighted in destroying his victims. Perhaps after all, the protector, Vishnu, was responsible for what had happened to him, and so he reasoned on until overcome with fatigue, hunger, and fear, he tripped and fell forward, hurt his head against a boulder in his path, and was soon deaf to the familiar voice within him and to all claims of nature, for he had quietly fainted away. Lingappa did not recover sufficiently to move for some hours, and continued to lie on, where he had fallen, in a half dazed condition. But as full consciousness took possession of him, he remembered his afternoon and evening's experience, and sat up with a beating heart to listen once

more if the voice were still within him. To his relief he did not hear it so distinctly. Mechanically he made his way homewards, but it was with faltering steps and bent head, or else of a surety he must have seen the Mussulman hastening along with that uncomfortable and heavy-looking bundle in his arms.

The way was very familiar along the beaten track, past six shrines and two temples, up one straggling uneven street, round a corner, and he was at the entrance of the home of his forefathers.

The smell of the buffaloes revived him, and he thought at once of the neglected animals' food: it was many hours past the time for their usual evening allowance, but he could not sleep himself until they had been attended to.

He supposed his wife and little daughter would be asleep long ere this, and so he did not enter the inner apartment at all that night, but instead sought his favourite resting-place on the pial, and without sleeping awaited with the half dreamy state of weakness for morning to dawn.

The shrill crow of the early rooster announced daybreak at last, and the sleepy villagers began to arouse themselves for such tasks as each new day brought in its train. The dogs hailed the breaking day with barks and growls; the crows set up their incessant "caw, caw," the men and some of the women, carrying their babies with them, went off to the fields, the small boys as-

sembled at school and began their endless repetitions, the women who were too old to work hobbled about and tended the babies left in their charge, the unmarried girls ran on errands or quarrelled with each other by way of diversion, but no bright-eyed Sundari appeared, and no sound came from the sick woman lying so still in Lingappa's house.

No one marvelled, for there were scores of fever-stricken mothers and wives in the village, and far too many little girls to have to scheme and arrange for in the way of marriage. Lingappa stirred himself from force of habit, fastened his cloth securely round him, placed his dirty turban straight, and then went in search of some water to clean his teeth. It was then he espied the family chumbu lying at the foot of the steps that led to the inner apartment. He picked it up, and carried it to the cook-room to fill it from the large earthen chatty that willing little Sundari always tried to keep full. To his dismay that was empty too, and so he called and called again for the child to go to the water-hole that he might have some water for his teeth. His stomach might be craving for food, but his teeth must be cleaned.

There was no answering voice from Sundari, who was usually so quick and responsive when he wanted her. He must have some water at any rate, and as it was quite out of the question for him to fetch it, his wife must get up and go ;

for one glance had sufficed to tell him she still lay in the same corner she had occupied for nearly a week.

He crossed the mud floor, and stooped to speak to the sleeping woman, but drew back in terror as he saw her wide open eyes fixed in an upward look with a horrible glassy stare. Her hands were clenched, and her body drawn as though with great suffering. He did not touch her, for he was sure she would be cold and stiff.

"The shaking devil has carried her off to his own regions," he said, "I must call the mid-wife."

Yes, little Sundari's mother was dead. She had gone forth in the dark night to the long hopeless future that heathenism presents to its followers.

She had gone forth alone, uncared for, unloved, like millions and millions of others who had preceded her. No ray of light had pierced the dark midnight of her soul. How could it when she dwelt in a land where the light was as darkness, and when she knew nothing of the Light and Life of the World. No one had ever told her of a Saviour's love for lost mankind. No one had ever whispered of blessed immortality beyond the dark river of death that all must cross. The daughters of enlightened lands were content to dwell in light and love, and bask in the sunshine of God's favour. Thousands might have hastened to do the urgent business of their King, but to sit at ease in Zion was so pleasant

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and comfortable, and while they rested, time rolled by and death claimed the millions of heathen still unevangelized. The message that Hilda Roi had brought on the previous afternoon, had come too late to reach the woman who lay dying only a few yards from where the messengers of peace had stood to tell out the words of Eternal life.

X

THE UNKNOWN FUTURE

LINGAPPA was too poor to entertain the thought of expensive funeral ceremonies. It was quite necessary that his wife's body should be put out of the way as soon as possible, but he had not enough money to buy the few sticks that would be required in building the funeral pyre. His indebtedness to the Ballapura money-lender made it quite impossible for him to raise a new loan. Added to this he was weary, hungry, and dispirited, and cared little or nothing what happened to himself or to what yet remained of the woman who had been his wife. Quickly the news spread from house to house that the carpenter's wife was dead. The village sweeper left his other duties to go the round of the village to collect the wood for building the pyre; for Lingappa had told him he could not pay for the fuel that would be required. The old man was not without some amount of sympathy for the trouble that had come to his neighbour, but it was only human nature that his thoughts should keep circling round the value of his own perquisites upon the present occasion.

He wondered how much the cloth, used to roll the dead woman in, would realize, as that together with the stakes used in building the funeral pyre, was what he usually received in payment for his services.

There was great consternation amongst the villagers when it was known that the unfortunate woman had died in the house, and Lingappa was duly blamed by the gossips for not getting her outside so that she might have breathed her last on pure mother earth.

Through such a catastrophe, not only was the house in which she had died rendered unclean, but the neighbours' houses and even themselves would also be polluted until the poor worn-out dead body was removed and burnt. So it came to pass that the poverty-stricken people of the village, through fear of pollution, and its attendant consequences, gave freely of their small piles of wood to assist in the burning, and willing hands prepared the thin emaciated form of Sundari's mother for the last sad offices of the dead. The preparations went quickly forward, and in less than four hours all that remained of the heathen girl who had grown old before she was twenty, was a smouldering heap of ashes upon the burning ground outside Lingapura.

To say that Lingappa mourned for the girl who had cooked his food, cleaned his house, and became the mother of his children would be imputing to him an almost unknown emotion; but

he was precise to follow out all the necessary purificatory ceremonies connected with her death. During the days that he was debarred from entering his house, or of having food cooked in it, his mind was full of his bright-eyed winsome little daughter of whom he could hear no news whatever. No one had seen her since the foreign lady had come to tell them of another Swami, and no one had heard anything concerning her. More astonishing still, than Sundari's disappearance was the fact that Osman the Mussulman troubled him no more, and indeed he troubled no one in the village.

This was a matter for great surprise, for as a rule he was at least a weekly visitor to the place, and nearly three weeks had passed since the last flutter of his long tailed turban had been seen in the narrow street of Lingapura.

August had dawned, and with its opening days Lingappa had made a great resolve. As soon as the time for the prescribed mourning was ended, he would part with his beloved buffaloes, gather his few possessions together, and go in search of his lost child.

He had no fear about obtaining food in his wanderings. He could surely beg as much by the way as he managed to get in the village. Without wife or child, his home was desolate and his poverty again asserted itself when he thought of another marriage. Several of the village girls had been offered to him by anxious

parents ; but he would have to wait many years before any of them were old enough to come to his house and perform a wife's duties for him. There had been too, a growing distaste within him for his work in and about the temples, and since the night when the mysterious voice sounded within him he had lost all zest in performing the pooja that previously had brought him some measure of consolation, for he firmly believed his acts of devotion would extract some blessings from the gods, that he had yet to learn neither saw, nor heard, nor spoke. He had waited with eager expectations for another visit from the English Dhorasani, but she came not. The earth yeilded no increase : the ground baked harder and harder, while here and there the dry surface cracked, and yawning gaps were to be seen instead of bending stalks of cholum heavy with the ripening grain, or the vivid green of the paddy fields smiling in full assurance of a plentiful harvest.

Rumour penetrated even far away Lingapura that the English Government had commenced some work, and would employ any man, woman, or child who applied to them. In this way, it was said, many thousands were earning just enough money to buy their food day by day. Another item of news was that the English Dhorai who preached in the market-place of Ballapura was having a great well dug in his compound just on purpose to give employment to the

starving people who worshipped the God of the English.

In the isolation of his uncleanness, Lingappa heard, thought, planned, and came to his great decision: but he could not venture forth in the darkness: he felt he must wait for the light half of the month, for with all his neighbours his belief in the power of the devils that roamed about in the darkness, caused him indescribable pangs of fear and dread. He thought out the details of his journey without taking any one into his confidence, until at last he summoned up courage to consult the village priest as to an auspicious day or moment for commencing his great undertaking; for unless he had the benediction of a smiling star, according to the fixed beliefs of the villagers, his journey would only be one long series of disasters.

The village priest of Lingapura was not morally worse than the class whose representative he was: but he was certainly no better than the majority of them, and it was not to be expected that he would consult the gods and say mantrams on behalf of Lingappa without some sufficient remuneration. When the carpenter offered to give him, as payment for his services at his wife's funeral obsequies, and for his consultation with the gods on his own behalf, the two fine buffaloes which alas had grown thin and poor during the last three weeks, the priest's greedy eyes glittered with the avarice in which his soul

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was steeped, and he determined to make it as easy as possible for the deluded man to obtain his heart's desire.

"Will my undertaking be successful?" asked Lingappa, without mentioning at first that he was contemplating a journey.

Without answering him directly, the priest retired to his private oracle, leaving Lingappa in an agony of suspense until he reappeared holding in his hands two small parcels tightly rolled round in a green leaf and tied securely to prevent their contents being seen. These he laid in front of the huge image representing the god Shiva, and he told Lingappa that if the god favoured him, he would allow him to choose the packet containing the white flower, but if he disapproved of his plans he would know it when the red flower was disclosed to his view.

With sincere devotion, Lingappa prostrated himself before the idol, and with nerveless, trembling fingers selected one of the two bundles. He could hardly control himself to hand back the small parcel to the priest, who, secure in the knowledge that he had put a white blossom in each bundle, proceeded in a leisurely fashion to unfasten the binding, and reveal to Lingappa's strained gaze the innocent little white jessamine bloom that was to be the augury of the god's smile upon his journey. So far, so good. The knowledge that Shiva favoured his plans led Lingappa to unfold to the priest what those

plans were, and to beg him to find out the auspicious moment for his departure from Lingapura.

Now the priest was anxious to get those two buffaloes into his possession lest Lingappa should change his mind and offer him something else in payment, and so he made short work over the second part of the service he was to render the intending pilgrim. After duly consulting his so-called oracles, he declared that Lingappa might start out the next morning when the morning star shone dimly forth, and he heard the first faint sound of the holy shell that was blown morning by morning to awaken the gods from their slumber.

Lingappa had little sleep that night; for his mind was busy with thoughts of what the coming days would reveal to him concerning his little daughter, and mingling with the thoughts of her was the remembrance of that never-to-be-forgotten voice that had sounded so clearly within him on the night of his wife's death.

He was on the alert when the midnight crow, and the "flap, flap" of the village cocks' wings were heard, and when a few hours later the unmusical note of the priest's sacred shell floated over the still sleeping village, he rose, picked up a small bundle containing his wife's paltry jewels, and only pausing to pat his precious buffaloes, and to give them a last friendly twist of their tails, he set forth in the cool dim hours of the

early morning to commence a journey that was to end in his finding something far more precious than his little Sundari.

He had not mentioned his intended journey to a soul beside the priest, lest some one should have tried to persuade him to remain at home, or should offer to walk part of the way with him, as these would have been most unlucky omens.

He had only gone a few steps when the faint "tweet, tweet" of an early lizard fell upon his nervous ear, and with a great swelling joy he recognized that it came from his right side, and felt assured with such a good omen at the very beginning of his journey, all would be well.

He did not pause in his walk until the sun was well up in the heavens, and then he began to look round for a place of shelter from the pitiless rays that seemed to scorch his bare back so unmercifully. In the distance he saw the bare walls of a deserted chatram, and made a cross cut from the road, that led to it in a direct line, hoping to find some water to drink near the old rest-house, as well as a cover from the burning heat of the sun.

XI

WILLING HEARTS

THE days of the hot weather that dragged out their weary length so mournfully for Lingappa brought in their train new cares for Hilda Roi who for the time being had to leave her visits to the outlying villages in abeyance, while she devoted all her time to duties nearer home. Often she thought regretfully of her inability to return to Lingapura, and follow up the teaching of her first visit, but all she could do was to wait patiently for days of more leisure to come round.

That glorious shower of rain that had so refreshed Ballapura, and the surrounding district towards the end of July had been the first and the last of the season. Instead of cooling showers, Ballapura and her inhabitants were feeling all the intensity of a slow heat wave that lingered with a strange pertinacity.

It seemed as though the bountiful downpour of that one night had come to mock the expectant hearts of the few Englishmen and women living in Ballapura, and of the ryots in the outlying districts.

Only the grain merchants grew fat and pros-

perous ; for the result of the drought told largely on the price of grain, which only the rich could afford to buy at the ruinous famine prices they were asking.

Men like Abu Taleb had all they needed and clamoured more loudly than those who had to curtail their two meals a day to one : while the masses of the people thought themselves lucky if they managed to get one satisfying meal in two days.

Gaunt-eyed famine stalked through the land, and the dread spectre of death kept her twin sister close company. No wonder Hilda Roi was passing through a time of anxiety. She had heard of famines before, but hearing of them was very different from experiencing them. She had between forty and fifty orphan and destitute girls to feed and clothe, and it soon became a problem how to get them the necessary food ; but she was determined that the children should have their regular meals whatever else they had to go without. She felt that illness and death might prove harder to fight than famine, and so day by day in spite of diminishing resources the usual quantity of rice was measured out, and the children in the Mission Home did not know what famine meant to those less favoured than themselves, until there came a day when Mr. Burton returned home sooner than was expected from his trip into the country, and brought with him four children whom he had found in a roadside hut. They

were slowly starving to death by the side of their already dead mother and baby sister. Of course Hilda received them gladly and willingly, did all she could to win them back to life and childish happiness; but two of them died in less than twenty-four hours of their arrival in the "Home," and the other two were only brought back from the verge of the grave through the unremitting care of the school-matron, and the warm light nourishment that Hilda administered at short intervals. The poor little things were ravenous at the sight of food, and would have died the first day from over-feeding if they had not been carefully watched.

The sight of these starving little ones opened the eyes and the hearts of Hilda's orphan children, and it was a glad surprise to her one evening when a deputation of the elder girls came to the front veranda of the bungalow, and laying aside much of their native reticence propounded their plan for helping the people who were so much worse off than themselves.

Krupai, the eldest, was chosen as spokeswoman, and after much prompting and nudging from her schoolmates, and to the nervous accompaniment of twisting and untwisting one corner of her sari, she began, "Dear Missyamma, there is much sorrow in our hearts for all the poor people who suffer hunger in these times of famine. You always give us plenty to eat."

"We did not know that others were dying be-

cause they had no food," chimed in a second eager voice.

"Gnanamma is better now, and she has told us all about it," said a third, and then a shy silence overcame the group of impulsive dark skinned children, and so Hilda came to the rescue saying,

"I am sure that you will all thank God that He has cared for you, and given you food and clothes and shelter. It is of His great love that all these good things come to you. Pray to Him, too, to shew mercy upon these suffering thousands in India."

"We will, we will," came in a chorus from all the girls who at the same time cast expressive encouraging glances in the direction of Krupai, who was indulging in the nervous pastime of cracking her finger joints. However, she soon found her voice, and began once again with what was evidently an interruption to a prepared speech.

"We would like to do more than pray for them. Missyamma has often told us we must shew our faith by our works. We have nothing of our own. The Missyamma gives us everything. Our food, our clothes, our books."

"Yes," said Hilda kindly, for she wanted to know what was behind all this long speech.

"We are strong and well. Missy gives us plenty to eat: we do not want so much every day. Please give us a little bit to eat."

Hilda divined the plan at once, but she deter-

mined to draw the girls out, and so hear all that was in their minds. With this thought she smiled back into the faces of her beloved children and said, "But how is that going to show your faith by your works?"

Impetuous little Ratua could wait no longer for the slow utterances of the deliberate Krupai; but with expressive gestures and quick words she poured out the ideas that had been circulating in the minds of the school children ever since the advent of the four famine victims.

"Oh dear, Missyamma, don't you see, if you give less rice to us, you will have some left over for the people who are so hungry. We all want to give a part of our own food to some one else every day while the famine lasts."

Hilda's eyes moistened, even though her heart leapt with joy, as she realized the true unselfishness of these children who were willing to deny themselves a portion of their own daily food so that others might be fed. So after a little more talk with them on the matter, she promised to give them the same daily allowance of uncooked grain, and from it they were to put on one side just as much as they wished to deny themselves of, and at the end of the week she would buy back from them at market rates the grain they had thus saved, and they were to have the money to give as their own special offering towards the "Famine Fund," that was being raised throughout the country.

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Such a generous meeting of their suggestion was altogether beyond the expectations of the "Deputation," and it was with a great effort that they managed to leave the veranda with some show of decorum; but their farewell evening words which they always essayed in pretty broken English were not forgotten.

"Good-night, dear Missyamma. Sweet repose. God bless you," and they were gone.

The minute their bare feet were off the veranda, they broke into a run, and regardless of scorpions or snakes they made the distance across the dark compound seem very short. After their race, they arrived almost too breathless to communicate the result of their mission to the rest of the children who were eagerly awaiting their return at the entrance of the orphanage.

The dark eyes flashed and gleamed with pleasure as they talked over how each girl was to go up to the basket of grain the next morning, and take out in her hand just as much as she wished to give as her share to the collection, and then all that was left was to be cooked and divided out equally when the meal-time came round. So they talked on and planned, and built wonderful castles in the air concerning all that their precious measures of grain would do towards helping their poorer neighbours.

At last their tongues ceased over even such an important topic. The younger children grew

sleepy, and only a few of the elder girls kept awake, quietly waiting for perfect silence to reign in the one large room where the mats were spread for the night. So crowded were the children lying upon them, that there was scarcely room to walk across the floor without stepping upon some of the recumbent bodies. A kerosene lamp hung from the centre of the ceiling, and shed a dim light, that was only just enough to show that here and there amongst the apparently sleeping girls, were kneeling forms, prostrate in prayer before the True and Living God. This was the one opportunity of the day, or rather of the night, that the girls who prized a quiet time with their Heavenly Father, could secure without fear of interruption from their companions. Not willful interruption; but their surroundings were not such as were conducive to privacy for quiet meditation, reading or prayer. This "Home" that had been such a haven of refuge for many years, for the long train of orphan and destitute girls that had such strong claims upon the love and sympathy of the lady missionaries in Ballapura, was scarcely deserving of such a sweet appellation, and yet it was all that it was possible to provide with the limited means the ladies had at their disposal.

One long, low, whitewashed room, with four tiny openings on each side to let in the air, a thatched roof, and a mud floor plentifully besmeared with cow dung, did duty for a dining-

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room, a study, and a sleeping apartment. The room was old, and, despite the watchful care of those in charge of the premises, sheltered various kinds of vermin, in addition to the thirty or forty children who luxuriated beneath its friendly roof. In the Monsoon season, the rain found out all the weak spots, and in the hot weather the weak spots became weaker, while the cracks widened into gaps which proved more than was desirable, even in the matter of ventilation. The place had been repaired, and added to from time to time during the thirty years it had been in existence, but it was altogether such a hopeless apology for the comfortable houses that Western philanthropy provided for the orphan and destitute of their own lands, that Hilda longed to set a match to the whole pile and lay it level with the ground.

But she had to restrain her ardent desires in this direction, for it certainly was a shelter, and until some one came to her aid with an open purse that should enable her to erect a building that should be more than a mere shelter, she felt for the sake of the children she must make the best of their present accommodation. She often planned for spacious rooms where the girls could sleep in coolness and comfort; for a dining-room, and two nice large bathrooms, so that they need not take their food and baths in the public way they were obliged to, for a flat stone under a tree did duty for a bath for the little ones, and a small walled-in enclosure served the elder girls in the

same direction. The dining-room they preferred to the one that was available, was large enough to suit all, for the dome of heaven was its roof, and the broad earth its floor. But above all these rooms for physical comfort, Hilda planned one that should be a quiet retreat, available at all hours for those amongst the girls who sought a closer walk with God. A room for prayer, and the study of God's Holy Word, a room where they could be free from the intrusion of the younger children, and where at appointed times kindred souls amongst them could meet together to seek the Divine blessing upon themselves and their work.

It was almost by accident that Hilda discovered how some of the girls were in the habit of keeping awake at night until many of their number were asleep, that they might rise and talk with God as friend with friend: and it was then she resolved that with God's blessing the day should come when her orphan girls should have a room of their own which should become fragrant with the incense of their prayers.

XII

THE MUSSULMAN AGAIN

OSMAN, the Mussulman, would trouble the inhabitants of Lingapura no more. When he hurried away so stealthily on that memorable night in July, seeking every friendly shadow that the moonlight cast, in his dread lest he should be discovered with the limp form of Sundari in his arms, he had no idea that his mean, sordid career was almost ended, or that Azrail, the angel of death, was even then following closely in his footsteps. He deigned no explanation to his wife concerning the unexpected arrival of the little Hindu girl in his home, but early in the morning he ordered her to dress the child in Mohammedan costume, and escort her to the abode of Abu Taleb. He merely added that he would himself precede her by a few minutes to prepare the sowcar for the latest addition to his harem.

Osman lived in a thickly populated quarter of Ballapura, where the poorer classes of Mohammedans congregated; his home and his surroundings were those of a really poor man, and his wife knew none of the luxuries of the veiled ladies of her faith. She was accustomed to go in

and out on the business of the household, and to frequent the bazaars for the sake of purchasing the daily food, and thus she came into contact with all sorts and conditions of people who haunted the crowded streets of Ballapura.

She knew Ruth and Mary, the two Bible-women, who went from house to house reading the Christian Scriptures, and she had often passed and repassed a certain corner where Mr. Burton was in the habit of preaching to interested crowds. She would have liked to have lingered amongst the coolie women on the outskirts of the listeners, but Mohammedan etiquette decreed that she should go straight on with her face well covered, and not seek to speak to any one by the way.

When Sundari awoke from her long, unnatural sleep, she cast wondering and startled eyes around the rough outhouse into which Osman had carried her just before daybreak.

Her head ached, and she felt no inclination to move from where she lay, but the conviction gradually stole into her mind that she was not in the familiar house at Lingapura. When she had fully decided this point, she made a movement to rise, and find out if possible where she could be, but with the first sound produced by the jingling of her little glass bangles, Osman's wife appeared.

The Hindu child and the Mohammedan woman gazed at each other in speechless silence for about half a minute, and in that long gaze

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Sundari took in every detail of the strange face and attire of this new specimen of womanhood; and the woman in her turn realized in that half-minute's scrutiny, the destiny of the lovely child standing with the mute, pleading look in her starlike eyes which even Osman's noxious drug had not robbed of their brilliancy.

Fatimah was old with anxiety; she was ugly from the cruel fingers of smallpox; she was Osman's wife, and she was a devoted follower of Mahomet, the prophet of God, but in addition, and beyond everything else she was a woman, and in that instant's gaze into Sundari's face her determination was registered as a vow before her God, to save the child from the power of Abu Taleb, her husband's employer.

Her own beloved daughter of tender years had been sacrificed in like fashion to the avarice of her husband, and to the expansive capacity of the rich man's harem. Perhaps her own lack of the beauty which the early years of her married life had robbed her of, had barely saved her from a similar fate; for she knew only too well that in spite of his pious ejaculations, his oft-repeated prayers, and the Koran carried so conspicuously wherever he went, her husband was unscrupulous in his dealings, and that he stopped short at no action that would bring the rupees into his possession. She judged Abu must have paid him a good round price for the lovely Hindu girl whom she resolved at all costs to de-

liver from the clutches of the tiger as the mentally named the money-lender.

Her mother's heart within her beat wildly at thought of her own daring, and she could not find her tongue to utter the words and thoughts that were rushing through her brain, but the undying love for her lost child changed her face in a second of time until the ugliness vanished, and the brown, deeply pitted skin seemed transformed; her small, mean eyes appeared to grow larger and become luminous with the reflection of her soul's yearning, and so Sundari, quick to note the transformation, no longer shrank back in fear, but in sweet liquid tones, as though sure of help and sympathy, simply said, "I want my mother. Where is my father?"

"My star, my pearl, my jewel, I know not. I will watch over you. No harm shall come to you. You shall have coffee and bread, and then we will talk about your father and mother." As old Fatimah thus sought to reassure the child, she led her into another room, a trifle less dirty and sordid than the tumble-down shed at the back, placed her on a cushion in the corner, and disappeared into her cook room from which the smell of fragrant coffee greeted Sundari.

But it was a new and unpleasant smell to her and made her feel faint and sick.

The village child thrives and was healthy in the odours emitted by the buffaloes, rats, dogs and fowls that shared her own home, but this

new smell of coffee was altogether disagreeable, and she was planning how to escape from it when Fatimah returned with a brass cup from which steam and the same strong unpleasant smell issued.

It took all the old woman's powers of persuasion to coax the little maiden to try and drink the strong coffee, for she had never tasted anything but water as long as she could remember.

To inspire the child with confidence Fatimah drank some herself, and praised its delicate flavour, dilated on the beautiful jaggory with which it was sweetened, and compared it to some wondrous celestial drink that only the faithful that reached Paradise would drink of, and at last Sundari yielded to her childish curiosity and swallowed some of the thick, black, ill-smelling stuff, which to the horror and deep distress of Osman's wife had the effect of making her small guest violently sick, and of revealing a new secret concerning her to Fatimah who then knew of a certainty how the long, heavy sleep had been produced.

The sickness over, Sundari felt better, and ate some of the coarse cholum bread moistened in a little water, and then she lay down and gave way to the sleep that again seemed to overpower her.

Meanwhile Fatimah moved about with unwonted gentleness, so as not to disturb the sleeping child.

She gathered together various bundles from

odd corners, and from first one and then another she laid out quaint little garments that had been stored up for as many years as had passed over Sundari's head.

There was a red petticoat lined around the bottom with green that at one time had been of a vivid hue but was now faded with the years that had fled; there was a thin orange-coloured garment, not unlike a Western chemise, ornamented and gay with silver tinsel braid; a bright-red silk, short-sleeved jacket opening in a V shape down the front, and last of all, a lovely lemon-coloured sari trimmed with shimmering gold tinsel that gleamed with a reddish glow as the rays of the morning sun found their way into the dusky abode.

Fatimah sighed ever and anon as she thought of her darling who had last worn these festive robes on the day when the Mohammedan grain-merchant, the sanctimonious old Abdallah, had first set his greedy eyes upon her, and had been so impressed with the vision of her sweet quaintness that he had there and then offered to pay her father a good price for her, and Fatimah had not been consulted in the matter any more than she would have been over the most trivial incident in her husband's daily business transactions. The innocent baby, for so Fatimah always called her, had been hurried away, and in less than two years had died, a victim to the life she led in the rich man's harem.

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If Osman could dispose of his own child so easily it was small wonder that he had no pity in his heart for the fate to which he was so carelessly dooming the happily unconscious Hindu girl.

While Fatimah was rejoicing in her simple plans for decking out Sundari in her lost child's holiday attire, and dwelling on the manner in which she would enhance the little stranger's loveliness by the use of artificial beautifiers so well known to Mohammedan women, whether of high or low degree, Osman was wending his way through the already crowded streets to the house of his master, the money-lender, and scheming as he went on the possibility of obtaining from Abu something beyond the promised discharge of Lingappa's debts.

He meant to dwell at length on the child's extraordinary beauty, and also to hint on all he had risked to obtain her ; on his self-sacrifice in passing her over to his master, and also to recall his many past services in a similar direction, but his own deep laid schemes and plans were put to flight in a very summary fashion by finding the sowcar in a state of great excitement over a telegram that had reached him an hour earlier.

Abu Taleb and Abdallah, the grain merchant, were in earnest conversation in an inner room, while one of the head clerks sat at the receipt of custom, not transacting his master's business, but keeping the various clients, who thronged the

office, even at such an early hour, awaiting with promises of the sowcar's speedy attention to their needs of the day.

Oman turned sullen at being kept so long from communicating the important news of which he felt himself to be the bearer, but he sat down amongst the rest of the loiterers, and soon his life's training asserted itself and he began to turn his spare time to account in trying to find out any secrets that might possibly be hidden under the dinky exterior of Abu's debtors.

He had waited more than an hour, when the stately old Abdallah, whose long beard seemed to rival his garments in their snowy purity, emerged from that inner apartment where he had been so long closeted with Abu.

His appearance was the signal for every one to rise and salute him with profound salaams, which were repeated again and again, with all due deference to the sowcar who followed, and parted from him with all the exaggeration attached to Eastern farewells.

It was a wonder to see Abu's usually serene face puckered with anxious care. For once his business politeness forsook him, for he did not attempt to return the greetings of the men in his bazaar.

But Oman had no intention of being overlooked, and so with all the cunning of which he was master, he bowed insinuatingly before the great man, until in his profoundest genuflection

he almost appeared to kiss the beringed toes of his master. Most certainly his turban touched the embroidery at the edge of sowcar's trousers, so closely did he obtrude himself. He gained his point, and that was all he cared for at that moment. Abu deigned to look down, and as he recognized his servant, the settled gloom on his face changed somewhat, as he informed Osman he wished to speak with him.

Osman rose and followed him to the sanctity of the inner office, with a strange flutter in the vicinity of his hardened old heart, and stood in a most becoming attitude of humility, awaiting for his superior to speak.

"Oh, Osman, my servant, you have served me well on many occasions. You have been faithful to my interests and you shall not go short of your reward," began Abu in an affectionate tone of voice, so different from the imperious tone he usually adopted, that Osman's skinny fingers began to interlace each other in a way indicative of a nervous ailment.

"Osman, thy servant. O Sahib," faltered the man, thinking he was expected to speak.

"Urgent business calls me to Bombay by to-night's mail. Business that no one but myself can attend to, but I require to accompany me some one who can find out several details necessary to the successful issue of my undertaking, and you are the one to whom I will trust the working out of my plans."

Abu paused, and looked steadily at the man's cringing face, as though to give him time to reply.

"In the name of God, the All Merciful, I am thy servant," murmured the Mussulman softly, but unmistakably, as his hand closed over a golden coin that the sowcar pushed towards him.

The money-lender rose from his cushions, and with his own hands, closed the door more carefully, and then invited Osman to be seated, while in a low, intense voice he revealed to him a few details concerning the proposed trip to Bombay.

Osman was quick of apprehension where cunning was needed, and he soon satisfied his master that he thoroughly understood all that was expected of him.

Not for one moment had he forgotten Sundari, and the reward he hoped to extract from Abu for his zeal in kidnapping her, but he made as though to retire, and the money-lender gave him a few parting instructions, telling him to be punctual to time at the Ballapura railway station, as the train left a few minutes before four o'clock in the afternoon.

Then it appeared as though a sudden thought struck him, for he turned, and with a servile salaam said, "Oh, Sahib, I have carried out your orders, and the beautiful Hindu girl is now in Ballapura, awaiting your noble commands concerning her."

“ The beautiful Hindu girl ; what girl ? ” asked Abu with well assumed indifference.

“ The starry-eyed, angelic little one, radiant as an archangel in form and beauty,” replied Osman with a curse in his heart, even while he called up all the powers of descriptive eloquence that he was capable of.

“ Oh, yes, I remember ; the new slave girl for the women’s apartments. She shall wait on my favourite wife until I return from Bombay. Bring her to the harem before you commence your journey,” and he waved Osman out of his presence with the gesture that the man knew quite well it was hopeless to dispute.

XIII

AZRAIL, THE ANGEL OF DEATH

AS Osman walked home after salaaming himself out of Abu's presence with the air of a man wholly devoted to his master's interests, he was as nearly in a rage as he ever permitted himself to be. He was clever in many respects, and therefore a very useful tool in the hands of his far cleverer master, who read his servant's character and ambitious scheming as easily as he read his Koran in the Arabic tongue. Abu knew very well that a large reward was expected from him when the little Hindu girl passed into his possession, and so he purposely refrained from giving his servant any opportunity of discussing the abduction with him. Osman fully realized, too, the game his master was playing, and in his anger at being foiled of his coveted reward, he cursed the fate that had led him to interfere in Lingappa's affairs.

The wretched superstitious idol-worshipper, Lingappa, had secured a certain amount of respite from paying his lawful debts ; his rich master had the gratification of pandering to his own weakness for a multiplicity of wives, but he was still the poorly-paid agent who at infinite trouble

to himself was the instrument fate used to favour others. As he mentally reviewed his case, and looked at it from his own standpoint, his temper did not improve. So disturbed was he, that he had no leisure for plans with regard to his impending journey. When he arrived at home, to his further disgust his wife had gone to the bazaar, and as he could not afford to take advantage of the prophet's ample provision of four wives, he had no one but Fatimah to be both loving wife, and obedient slave combined.

The badge of servility suited Osman admirably in the presence of such men as Abu and Abdallah, but he was a veritable autocrat in his own home, and in dealing with his master's debtors.

He thought he would try and sleep while his wife was still away, for he had given his previous night's rest to serving Abu's interests, he assured himself as though he had hoped for nothing in return, and now two nights' journey by rail to Bombay loomed ahead of him, and a dangerous enterprise to follow when he would need his keenest powers to be on the alert.

So he lay down, and sought to sleep, but sought in vain, for his ruffled feelings would not be smoothed sufficiently to allow him to yield to the demands of nature, and when Fatimah returned an hour later, he was wide awake and ready to vent upon her what he dare not betray in the presence of Abu Taleb.

Fatimah bore his ill-temper meekly as became a Mohammedan woman, and moved about more energetically than was her wont to prepare the savory pillaw he demanded for his meal before he set out on his journey. He told her he expected to be away on business for quite a week, but never mentioned whither he was bound, and she did not ask, for, what right had a slave to inquire into her master's concerns? Apart, too, from Osman and his business, all her thoughts were with little Sundari whom she contrived to keep out of his sight.

At last, the time for his departure to the station arrived. He had made no unnecessary preparations for the journey. A change of clothes, including a finely embroidered shirt of Abu's hired for the occasion, his prayer carpet, and the Koran tied in one bundle, and a little cold rice put up into another was all he needed. All was confusion at the branch station of Ballapura. Hundreds of natives swarmed the third-class carriages of the train that connected with the Bombay mail some forty miles down the line.

Abu, in his rich attire, his European portmanteau, and his servants hurrying to and fro were objects of attention to the less favoured travellers. A good meal, and his self-complacent nature had helped him to recover his usual equanimity. He had settled himself comfortably in a first-class compartment without so much as

noticing outwardly the arrival of Osman, but his keen eye had signalled him out as soon as he had arrived on the platform, and he felt all the more satisfied when he saw the Eurasian guard lock the door of the third-class carriage within which he had disappeared.

The sunny-faced Bible colporteur, of the London Missionary Society, was making the most of his opportunity amongst the travellers of all tongues and creeds. He succeeded in disposing of some dozens of portions of scripture before he approached the wealthy Abu to whom he had offered a New Testament in Hindustanee. Knowing Abu well as a fanatic concerning his creed, he was not at all surprised at the insolent manner in which he was repulsed, but it made no difference to him in his endeavour to bring within the reach of all, the words of Eternal life.

He was more successful with a Parsee gentleman who, out of curiosity, as he afterwards explained to his travelling companions, purchased a copy of the gospel of John in the English language.

Telugu, Kanarese, Marathi, Hindustanee and Tamil portions of God's Holy Word were offered for sale in every one of the third-class compartments, up till the very minute when the guard's whistle sounded and the train began to move. Even then Yohanappa, the colporteur, ran to place in a brown outstretched hand his last little gospel of Mark in Hindustanee.

When the Ballapura train arrived at the junction, all was bustle once more, and even the slow movements of the natives shewed signs of hurry as each for himself sought the most comfortable place he could find in the mail train. Osman was disgusted to find himself pushed into an already overcrowded carriage with no chance of a quiet sleep by the way, and now that his irritated temper had spent itself he began to feel very weary. To his relief some of the passengers alighted at every station, but others continued to take the vacated places until well on to early morning when the rush of passengers slightly decreased, and he found room in which to stretch his cramped limbs.

As soon as he was in a more comfortable attitude he fell soundly asleep, and did not wake until after the sun was up, and his usual prayer hour had passed by.

For once he had omitted a duty that he was most punctilious in performing, and so in spite of his surroundings, and the fact that the early prayer hour had passed, from long, long years of habit he began to repeat, "God is great; God is powerful; God is all powerful," as his fingers sought the accustomed beads on which to see that he made no mistake, he told off the number of times he said over the required formula.

Although Abu had travelled in the luxury befitting his status in Mohammedan society, he was as well pleased as his servant Osman when

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the journey came to an end, and he found a well appointed brougham drawn up at the Bombay railway station, waiting to convey him in all due style to the house of his uncle, who also practiced the art of money-lending.

According to their prearranged plans, Osman sought the Mohammedan quarter of his own class where he was to lodge for two or three days while he went secretly to work to find out certain items concerning the financial position of a jeweller of repute who was largely in debt to Abu Taleb, and his partner, the grain merchant Abdallah.

There was no doubt that Osman was thoroughly tired, and he resolved to have a long refreshing sleep before setting to work on the following day. To his surprise, he began to pass through streets that seemed entirely deserted. In some he noticed houses with the roofs taken off, and in others it looked as though house after house had been pulled down or partly demolished, while on nearly every door there was a huge cross painted either in white or red, and beneath the cross there were some mysterious English letters that he did not understand. Finally after much searching, and frequently enquiring his way from the few passers-by he met, he arrived at the house to which he had been directed, and noted that it too had got the mysterious markings upon it, and appeared to be quite deserted.

He called aloud ; he shook the door, and then he called again in his most authoritative voice, but no one answered from within. By and by his repeated cries brought a man and a pariah dog from an opposite house.

He salaamed to the man, and asked with a little exaggerated politeness if Omar Sahib lived in the street. The man whom he interrogated shook his head wearily as he replied,

“ Omar Sahib died of plague last night, and all his family have fled to escape being taken to the plague camp.”

“ Plague ! ” ejaculated Osman, startled into sudden fear.

“ Yes, every house in this street has been visited, and all who have not died, have run away unless they have been forced into the camp by the English officials.”

Ballapura had been quite free from the dreaded scourge, and as Osman was not a devotee of the daily papers, he was almost totally ignorant of the ravages made by the dread disease in the great and populous city of Bombay.

But now his eyes were opened, and opened wide with terror that seemed to rob him of his usual acuteness. He stood simply staring at his informant unable to utter a sound with the parched tongue that fear caused to cleave to the roof of his mouth ; but the rumble of wheels in the distance made him turn mechanically

in the direction from which the sound proceeded, and as he did so, the man to whom he had appealed exclaimed,

“Here they come to search the houses for the dead and dying,” and he hastily retired within his own doorway, lest he too, should be summarily hurried away in company with the loathsome bodies already packed in the cart for the dead. Poor Osman stood, a solitary figure in that deserted street, and watched for five minutes with a fascination born of his overwhelming terror, the searchers enter three houses, and carry out a corpse from each. One he saw very distinctly, brought from the very house of Omar, with whom he was to have lodged during his stay in Bombay.

It was the form and figure of a young girl, but her nose and ears had been ruthlessly chopped off in order to defy identification, and her long, black hair was stained with blood, shewing that the barbarous deed must have been committed immediately her last breath was drawn. It was a sickening sight, and one that roused the affrighted Mussulman from his torpor, for he turned and literally fled along the very way the cart for the dead had come.

The long end of his turban flapped and fluttered in the slight breeze; he dropped his Koran and the bundle containing his change of raiment, but on he went, heedless, breathless, panting with his great exertion, with but one de-

sire, only to get away from the silent, deathlike quarter, and the gruesome sights he had witnessed outside Omar's house.

The sudden darkness of the tropical night descended even while he ran, and such unaccustomed exercise instead of the usual stately walk and demeanour he affected, told on the fugitive, who was fain to stop from utter exhaustion. The feet that ought to have been light as feathery wings in aiding his flight seemed weighted with lead, and almost before he was aware of it, for the second time that week, fate in which he believed so firmly, was on his track. His foot caught in a nameless something, and he fell heavily forward over a warm, breathing body. Happily unconsciousness flung her kindly arms around him, and he knew not that he had fallen across a still living plague stricken man who had been flung out of a neighbouring house by his terrified relatives, who dreaded to have a dying man found on their premises lest they should be compelled to give up all their household goods to the hands of the public disinfecter, and in addition to this, run the risk of having the home of their fathers destroyed, and themselves hurried forth to live in tents in the open country, or worse still, to be kept in a "Segregation Camp" for ten days, and then turned out to find home and possessions had disappeared, friends and relatives dead, and themselves destitute wanderers, perhaps to be stricken in their turn by

plague, as they stole like resurrected ghosts through the streets and bazaars where they had once lived in smiling prosperity.

It was past midnight when Osman came to himself, for the moon had risen, and by her brilliant light he was able to see the ghastliness of his position as he lay across the now dead body of a stranger.

With difficulty he aroused himself for one more attempt to escape from a place of such horror. Where to go, he knew not, and almost mechanically his footsteps led him towards the station at which he had arrived earlier in the afternoon.

But it seemed a weary tramp, and long before half the distance had been covered, he again sank upon the ground overcome with fear, weariness, and want of food, for he had not partaken of a good meal since he had eaten so heartily of his favourite pillaw that his wife had set before him an hour or so before he had commenced his disastrous journey.

The morning broke just a little chilly, and when the sun rose Osman was still lying where he had fallen the second time in his exhaustion ; but with the warm rays of the sun kissing his upturned face, new power seemed to become his and he crawled into a sitting posture, all unmindful of his morning prayers.

He sat for a time, and then slowly staggered to his feet with a confused idea of finding a place

where he could obtain some coffee : he struggled along for a few spaces, but his head ached with a painful throbbing, and the blood coursed through his veins like some fiery liquid : he rubbed his hands together but they were burning in a most unaccountable manner. Another few steps, and he reeled like a man who has drunk too freely of arrack, and for the third time he fell heavily on the ground, but this time there was no tangible object lying in the way to trip unwary feet.

"Yes, bring him in. There are several beds vacant this morning, five or six of our patients died during the night," were the words that floated through the dim distance, till they pierced poor Osman's deadened brain. Native doctors and gentle women nurses ministered with sympathy and love to the new case that had been packed up in the street, and brought for admittance to the plague hospital; but there were hundreds of other sufferers claiming their attention, and so they could not spend any undue amount of time with the strange Mohammedan man who lay hour after hour in the grip of the fell disease that had laid its burning hand upon him. From time to time the nurses administered such nourishment and medicine as they could, and towards midnight one of the doctors lanced the huge swelling that appeared under the arm, but poor, mean, cringing, avaricious Osman drooped beneath the scourge, and within forty-eight hours of the time he had set foot in Bombay, his dead

body was being hurriedly buried in company with scores of other nameless dead.

No pompous funeral rites were his. No mark would ever cover his unknown resting-place, and no relatives would resort from time to time to his grave in the hope that his spirit hovering in seraphic tranquillity around his tomb, would be gratified at the sight of their devotion to his memory.

XIV

ABU'S FAVOURITE WIFE

IF Osman's wife Fatimah had ever been in the habit of thinking for herself, or deciding her own plan of action, she would have taken advantage of her husband's absence for a week, by keeping little Sundari in her own home for some days at least; but even the great yearning mother-love that had sprung up in her heart for the beautiful child so unexpectedly thrust upon her would not allow her to defy her master's orders. She had lived a life of repression, amounting to servility, for too many years for her to begin to consult her own feelings or desires, and so she had no thought beyond that of implicit obedience.

Osman had said, "Dress her in Mohammedan costume, and take her to Abu Taleb's house," and that was the task she set herself to fulfill as soon as the echo of his slippered feet died away in the distance. Sundari had fallen into a refreshing sleep after her meal of bread and water, and felt more like her lively little self as she watched with awakened interest old Fatimah's preparations on her own account, while her ever ready tongue found its natural use in talking and

asking questions, but it was hard to talk to one whose language she could not altogether follow. She was as familiar with Telugu as she was with Kanarese, but Fatimah's Hindustani and Tamil presented her with many a puzzle. However she managed to understand that she was to be taken to another place that was not her beloved Lingapura, and when Fatimah assured her that she was to live always with a beautiful pale faced Dhorasani her heart bounded with joy ; for immediately she thought of the white lady who had played the weird music, and who sang about a new Swami who loved people instead of hating them as all the gods in Lingapura did ; and she hoped it was to her house she was to be taken. With this hope in her heart, she submitted patiently, and with some degree of real pleasure to being bathed in hot water, and then douched in cold. The gentle rubbing of her whole body with fragrant saffron, as Fatimah sought to polish up her smooth brown skin, sent such a pleasant glow through her that she began to forget her sorrow at being so far from home and friends.

Fatimah worked with a will strengthened by love ; for the practice of all her little arts and devices brought to her mind the days of old, when the prattle of her own lost darling made the dull dirty house as a corner of Paradise for her.

The old woman clapped her hands with glee to see how the effect of the child's bright eyes was enhanced by the darkening of the eyelids, but

her short curly hair caused her an infinite amount of trouble. All the greasy oil that she lavished so abundantly upon it would not reduce it to the shining straightness which is the pride of the Moslem woman's heart.

If Sundari could have viewed herself arrayed in festive Mohammedan robes, she would have said some demon had in a sportive mood, changed her into one of the gay heroines of her own stories of the Hindu gods and goddesses; but Fatimah possessed no looking-glass that would enlighten the child as to the transformation that had taken place in her appearance, and so she was content to believe the old lady's oft-repeated information, that she was divinely lovely as the attendant black-eyed Houris of the heavenly garden where all true believers would enjoy to the fullest extent the highest bliss that even they were capable of imagining.

It was a new experience for the village maiden of Lingapura, to be dressed, perfumed, and flattered so lavishly and she liked it so much, that soon the last sigh of regret for the life of only yesterday, had ceased to be drawn. When a large white sheet had been thrown all over her red petticoat and lemon coloured sari, and wound around her in such an ingenious fashion that only her dark bright eyes could be seen, she was fully prepared to take the hand of Fatimah, and trot along by her side in deepest content with regard to her unknown future.

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It was a good thing for the little Hindu maid, that her eyes remained uncovered, for all that her natural shrewdness saw, and stored up for future use, made her forget the fatigue of walking in such unaccustomed finery. The child of nature, clad in a ragged sari found locomotion a different matter when carrying the burden of petticoats, jackets, and sari with the big winding sheet added as an extra precaution.

Several times she tried to slip the heavy covering off her head, but Fatimah quickly anticipated her intention and with many Eastern gesticulations, together with words of endearment that Sundari could not appreciate, she insisted on the heavy covering being worn until she reached her destination.

Fatimah was always a welcome visitor to the secluded women of Abu's household. She stood between them and the outside world of which not one had ever caught more than a passing glimpse, for they were women of high degree who could not be allowed to step beyond the precincts of their own home. Their lifelong seclusion made them entirely ignorant of all they were deprived of. Why should they long for that which they had never seen? Sometimes they rather pitied Fatimah her freedom. It was quite true, the old woman always went about closely veiled, but then, the very fact of her walking alone through the open bazaars proclaimed her of low estate. Better be a high-

born prisoner according to Mohammedan idea, than a free woman of lowly degree. Nevertheless it was a little break in life's monotony when Fatimah arrived, carrying her tales of the world that throbbed, and pulsated with such abundant life outside their harem.

But to-day was the first occasion on which she had come burdened with the important task of introducing a beautiful new slave girl to the women's apartments. The inmates, already consumed with jealousy, one of the other, idleness, and general inertia, were not so ready to lend an ear to old Fatimah as they usually were, when Sundari's outside covering was removed and she stood revealed in all her innocent loveliness which had been artificially enhanced, in the secret desire of Fatimah's heart that the women should become jealous of her, and thrust her out refusing to receive her in the absence of the man on whose favour both the lawful wives and the slave girls hung in timid but aspiring expectation.

There was not one of those down-trodden women who in the darkened chambers of her soul would not have yielded her prospects in an uncertain heavenly Paradise for the earthly bliss of being regarded in the light of Abu Taleb's favourite wife.

Fatimah explained her errand to the curious women, and answered their questions as far as she could, while the wondering Sundari stood in

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a state of bewilderment at the new scene in which she found herself.

Every one seemed to be talking so fast, and so unintelligibly, and she could form no idea of what it was all about, except in a vague way that she was the object of their conversation; for with every fresh item of information imparted by Fatimah, the eyes of the women were turned upon Sundari in an enquiring fashion until she could stand it no longer, and her over-wrought feelings found vent in a loud and unrestrained burst of weeping in which cries for her mother and father were freely mingled.

Her tears washed the black pigment from around her eyes, and soon the inky mixture coursed down her saffron besmeared little face, until she presented a woeful appearance indeed, and she looked no longer the pretty bright expectant little stranger who had so lately stepped across the threshold of Abu's harem. Her grief and abandon did more towards enlisting the sympathy of the women, than any other appeal that she could have made. Her beauty was a good reason for fierce jealousy, but her sorrow made her one with them. Fatimah would fain have clasped her to her heart, and carried her away to her own humble dwelling.

"Weep not, my pretty pearl," she said soothingly, "I will love you. I will watch over you. I will come to see you every day, and you will soon be happy again."

But Sundari's tears would not cease at command, now that they had broken forth, and she wept on convulsively.

"Take her away, Fatimah, we want no heathen Hindu girls here. Take her away," one of the older women ordered; and Fatimah only too willing to obey, was about to throw the heavy sheet around her, and carry her off when a wonderfully sweet voice that had hitherto remained silent spoke with the accents of extreme languor.

"You are not to take her away. She belongs to me. My lord told me so just before he started on his journey. He said she was to be with me always until his return." The soft words spoken in Telugu fell like music on Sundari's ears, after the confused babel of Hindustani, and she smeared her face still more in her endeavour to dry her tears that she might see the owner of the friendly voice and the familiar tongue.

Fatimah had no choice but to bid the child farewell with many promises of returning early on the following day. The other women began to quarrel for want of another pastime. The demon of jealousy had been aroused in them when they heard their lord and master had signalled out his last married, and up till the present his favourite wife Rokaia for a good-bye visit, and had left the rest of them without a word of explanation. They did not even know he had gone on a journey until Rokaia's unlucky interference on behalf of Sundari.

Poor little fifteen-year-old Rokaia had only been an inmate of the harem for rather more than a year. She was bright and happy as any Moslem girl, when she left Madras as the bride of Abu, but alas ! for her all things had changed when she found she had been brought to Ballapura to despoise three older women from the changeable affections of her lord.

He was always kind to her, loading her with presents of jewellery and rich clothing, but his very apparent partiality rendered her such an object of jealousy and hatred to the other wives, as well as to the female servants, that before many months passed away she began to droop like an imprisoned songstress of the woods. Her home became a gilded cage ; her jewels were as golden fetters ; her bright silken robes oppressed her, and she longed to return to her father's house where her own mother was the undisputed wife, and she herself had played happily with her own brothers and sisters. She did not know that her father was wise in his generation, and possessed sufficient foresight to establish separate homes for each of the three women who held sway over his affections. Her days passed hopelessly by ; her lustrous black eyes grew heavy ; her delicate olive complexion assumed a pasty hue ; her shining hair lost its gloss, and her rounded limbs shrank until she was no longer the bright healthy little Rokaia of one short year ago.

Only her voice remained the same as of old ; sweet, full, and pure.

No wonder Abu had tired of her, whispered the inmates of the harem and all but she whose eyes were almost sightless with the tears she had shed, might know at a glance that the bright little Hindu maid had only been introduced in the guise of a slave in order to supplant the worn out Rokaia with her lord.

" Had not they all been beautiful in their time ? " they asked themselves indignantly, for there were times when even they rebelled at the position they were forced into.

Truly Sundari found herself in a hotbed of female jealousy, and there was no escaping from it. No trips to the water-hole in the shingle bed outside the village, no playing at hide and seek in the temples ; no story telling to admiring village companions ; no occupation of any sort came to enliven for her the dull hours of her first few weeks as a member of the money lender's household. There was not even the pleasure of nursing Rokaia's baby boy which as the most precious inmate of the house had been taken from the delicate drooping young mother, to be well cared for by a nurse of robust physical health, and sound Moslem principles. But in some inexplicable fashion, the miserable little Mohammedan wife, and the hitherto untamed village child crept into each other's hearts and lives.

The kindness that Rokaia had thrown into her

voice on the day of Sundari's arrival, continued to be exerted on behalf of the little stranger, till it seemed the most natural thing that Sundari should always be found hovering around her lounge pillows when she was awake ; ministering to her in numberless little ways that only real love could dictate ; talking to her of things the shut-in Rokaia was as ignorant of as a new-born baby, and when she slept, lying beside her, keeping watch like some faithful dog.

XV

SOWING THE SEED

A FORTNIGHT had run its course since Sundari's introduction into Abu Taleb's household of women, and the master who ruled their destinies was still absent. Moreover no message had reached the ears of the women folk, and even his favourite, Rokaia, was in ignorance as to the date of his return. Fatimah came and went as usual, but her visits were more prolonged than in past days, for time had only served to strengthen her strange love for Sundari. As the days lengthened into weeks, she began to talk in troubled tones to the servants as to what could have become of her own master who had never stayed so long away from home before.

Abu's business in Bombay could not be settled satisfactorily for the want of the information that Osman was to bring him, but Osman did not come, and Abu was beguiled by his host to drink deeply of all the pleasures the populous and wicked city of Bombay offered to men of his position, wealth and character.

The first week fled as on eagle's wings, and still Osman delayed to appear with his important

news. Another week, and Abu came to himself after his self-indulgence, and unwonted dissipation, and with the shrewdness that seemed to have deserted him for the time being, he came to the conclusion something must have gone wrong with Osman his faithful servant who had never before failed him in an emergency. Having decided this point, he communicated with the police who set enquiries on foot.

Impatiently Abu waited for news, and was far from reassured when the chief of the police himself called to say that a man answering to the description that he had given of Osman, had sought and found the house of one named Omar in the Mohammedan quarter of the city.

But Omar lived in a street which the plague had swept almost clean of its inhabitants, and the stranger who sought lodgings with him had gone away as though disappointed. The next morning, the house searchers had picked up a bundle, containing a change of raiment, a worn prayer carpet, and a copy of the Koran. The same morning a Mussulman had been found stricken with plague, lying about half a mile from the railway station. He had been taken to the hospital and had died the same night without disclosing his name or his place of residence.

"What has become of the bundle, you say you found?" asked Abu.

"It is at the police station, Sahib," answered the native policeman, making a respectful salaam.

“Bring it to me, and if I can identify it, I shall think my servant must have been he who died of the plague.”

In an incredibly short time, the bundle was brought, and Abu bade the man open it, and spread out its contents. The faded, dirty scrap of carpet used for devotional exercises, and the well-thumbed old copy of the sacred Koran, he could have kicked in his disgust, but when a white muslin shirt with a peculiar pattern of embroidery upon it was exposed to view, he seized it eagerly, examined it minutely, and then threw it down as though a scorpion had stung him, for he had recognized the dhobi mark of his own clothes, and knew the bundle must have belonged to Osman, for he was quite aware of the practice of the dhobies to lend out for a small sum the clothes of their patrons.

“The bundle could not have belonged to my servant. Take the evil-smelling things away, and burn them,” he ordered, as a sickly faintness overcame him, and he felt like reeling backwards on the cushions of his lounge. For almost half an hour fear clutched at his heart with icy fingers, as the certainty forced itself upon his mind that Osman had fallen a victim to the plague, that might even then be at work in his own system. While he thought, he began to fancy his head ached, and his body burned. His imaginations carried him far enough to make him feel under both his arms to ascertain if the bubo had com-

menced to put in an appearance. To find no indication of it did not really allay his awakened fears, and he resolved that he would stay no longer in the death-shadowed city, but would leave his friend Ebrahim Sait, to conclude his business affairs while he himself travelled towards peaceful Ballapura as fast as the express train on the Great Indian Peninsula Railway would carry him.

Abu announced his intention of returning home that day, but his uncle told him he could not possibly arrange to leave by that afternoon's mail as he must obtain a medical passport before he could be allowed to leave the city. The money-lender was already in a state of nervous excitement, and when he learned that he must be examined by a doctor, and receive his permission to return home, his anger was fully aroused, and he declared with many imprecations that he would never submit to such tyranny.

Abu trusted to his wealth, and his standing as a leading sowcar, to release him from complying with the rules that were all very well for the lower orders, and the outcast Hindus: so without paying any attention to his uncle's advice that he should drive to the nearest doctor, and get his passport signed, he avowed his determination to take his ticket in the usual way, and go home without the interference of any authorities.

His portmanteau was soon packed, and thinking he would on this occasion dispense with the intermediary services of a servant, he arrived at the railway station, and in all the conscious dignity of a prosperous Mohammedan gentleman he forced his way through the cosmopolitan crowd around the ticket-window and demanded a first-class ticket to Ballapura.

"Yes, Sahib. Will the Sahib kindly shew his passport?" asked the native clerk, deferentially, as he noted the wealth of jewels displayed by Abu.

"Passport? Here is my passport," and he pushed some golden coins in payment of his ticket, towards the astonished man.

"The Sahib does not understand. I mean a doctor's certificate to say he is in perfect health."

There were others waiting their opportunity to show their passports and to purchase their tickets and they began to grow impatient at being kept waiting while the rich man argued with the ticket-clerk. The people at the back jostled those in front, and gradually Abu felt himself being hemmed in, while he fancied he could again smell the disgusting odour that Osman's bundle had emitted, and again he felt faint, and the same indescribable giddiness, that he had experienced in the early morning, nearly overcame him.

"If you have no passport, Sahib, kindly move away and make room for others." The clerk

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spoke less respectfully than at first, and his voice had a far-away sound in it, nevertheless Abu moved, and made an attempt to get on to the platform where he could see the train drawn up. But the entrance to it was guarded by burly policemen who strove to keep order amongst the thousands of frightened people, who like Abu, were fleeing from the city of destruction.

With strenuous efforts on the part of the guardians of the gate, they were filtered through one by one, and made to produce their passports to the officers who were in charge of the platform, and Abu was convinced at last that there was no hope of getting through the narrow gate that meant home, safety, and immunity from plague without that official strip of paper, and he turned away with supreme disgust just as the gates were closed with prompt decision, and the surging masses were told the train was already too heavily freighted, and no more passengers could be taken that day.

Abu knew there was but one course open to him now, and that was to return to his uncle's house, confess himself defeated in his attempt at surreptitious flight, and sink to the dignity of a medical examination.

"Send for one of our men," he urged. "A bribe will soon procure me the necessary certificate."

"Alas : alas, my son ; only those appointed by Government are allowed to sign the official passport, and so you must present yourself in the

ordinary way at the appointed time and place, and be examined by the usual methods."

"Then let us get through with it at once for I must leave this accursed place to-morrow."

"Patience, patience, peace, my son. God is all merciful. God is powerful," said the older man mildly but exasperatingly. "Why such haste, and such fear? If you are to succumb to the plague, you will die no sooner for remaining here a few hours longer. Moreover you cannot see the doctors until to-morrow morning. The offices close at six o'clock."

No allurements were strong enough to tempt Abu abroad that night; sleep deserted him, and fear held him in triumphant embrace. The next morning he was amongst the first applicants for a passport, and as the rush of business had not commenced, the Parsee doctor, who was on duty for the first few hours, gave the Mohammedan gentleman his best attention. He felt his pulse; he looked at his tongue, and apparently not being satisfied with the story they told, he produced a clinical thermometer and took his temperature. Again Abu experienced that horrible uneasy sensation, and the doctor happening to glance at his face, saw the fear it betrayed, and noted the haggard expression of the eyes. His idea that all was not well was confirmed when he saw that the thermometer recorded a slight rise of temperature. With maddening deliberation he turned to the eager man and said, "Sahib, I very much

regret that I shall have to detain you for a day or so. You have a slight, a very slight rise in your temperature, only the matter of a degree or so; it may be due to over anxiety, or it may indicate fever, and as you know fever generally precedes plague, so that I must, though very reluctantly, refrain from allowing you to leave Bombay to-day."

Others were claiming attention, and the force of circumstances once more made it necessary for Abu Taleb in all the rage of his burning disappointment to make way for them. Passport, or no passport: plague or no plague, he was fully determined to leave Bombay that afternoon. "What is the good of all my wealth, if it cannot help me in an emergency like this?" he muttered, and once more summoning his servant, who carried his portmanteau, he hired a common jutka, and gave the driver orders to take him some twenty miles out of Bombay. Dismissing the man with a large fee, he made his preparations for the various detours he had arranged while being jolted along in the jutka, and before dawn of the next morning he had the satisfaction of finding himself out of the plague infected area. His satisfaction was somewhat marred by the knowledge that he was thus a good deal further from home than he desired to be.

By the lavish expenditure of his rupees he boarded without question a local train that carried him many miles on to where he could connect

with another train, that in the course of twenty-four hours would land him at a point from whence he could take a slow train that would set him down within a bullock-cart journey of Ballapura. Thus the days of his absence were prolonged, and the women of his harem in Ballapura having less cause for jealousy because he was not there to favour one more than another, grew more friendly amongst themselves, and began to share in the little diversions that Sundari's advent had caused. She was a child of the great unknown world, and when once her sorrow and shyness had worn away her naturally lively temperament asserted itself, and she beguiled many weary hours for Rokaia by her stories of the gods and goddesses of Hindu fame. In time, it became quite the event of the day for the women to gather around the sick girl's mat, and listen with eyes, as well as ears to Sundari's lively imaginations.

Sometimes Rokaia would act the part of interpreter for the sake of the women who did not fully follow Sundari's village Telugu.

Old Fatimah was nearly always a privileged listener, for she remembered her promise to come every day to see her little favourite.

One day she begged for a repetition of the story the white woman had told on Sundari's last eventful day in her old home. This was a story the child loved well herself, and she always threw all her natural talent into the recital of it.

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She described the strange woman's wondrous garments, and the whiteness of her skin; her musical instrument, and her foreign accent in talking Kanarese. But all this was merely by way of an introduction to the part of the story that appealed to them more especially.

"She told us," Sundari continued in dulcet tones, "that a powerful King, who was her friend, had sent her with a message to every woman and girl in our village. Her friend desired that we should all know He loved us very much, and would care for us always, and do us good while we lived in this birth, and when this life was over He would take us to live with Him in a place more beautiful than we could imagine Kailasa to be."

"Kailasa means to Sundari, the same as Paradise means to us," explained Rokaia.

Sundari waited for the explanation, and then calmly continued, "The name of this great King is Jesus. He is different from our gods because He does not send some dreadful punishment upon us when we forget to do pooja to Him. He does not favour men more than women. He gives joy, rest, and peace to all alike. We cannot see Him with these eyes," and Sundari touched her own expressive ones, "but we can see Him with some new kind of eyes that He will give to every one who desires to have them.

"All this the lady told us, and she promised to come back another day, and tell us the rest of

her message, so that we could learn to love, and worship her King Jesus."

"I wish she would come here too. It is often dull and lonely. I would like to hear the beautiful music you say she carried," said Abu's eldest wife. "I would like to have those new sort of eyes, so that I could see the wonderful King for myself. Our master never seems able to care for more than one of us at a time. I can't understand how this King Jesus can love everybody exactly the same," murmured the girl who was only the senior wife over Rokaia by a few months.

"I would like the happiness and the rest," sighed little Rokaia, "but how can we get it when there is no one to show us the way?"

"Shall I bring the white Mem Sahib here?" eagerly asked Fatimah. "I know the two native women who go about with her, and I know the English Sahib who preaches in the vegetable bazaar every evening."

"Would she come if you asked her?" came in chorus from the listening women.

"If her friend Jesus is kind and loving, and wants everybody to know about Him, perhaps He would be glad if we knew more about Him."

"Oh, but we are Moslem women, secluded behind the purdah. I don't suppose He ever heard of us. It can only be Hindu women, and the white women like the Mem Sahib whom He loves," suggested another one in a sad voice.

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“ Well, Fatimah, bring her to see us, while the master is still away, and we will ask her all about her Jesus,” said the eldest of the women in such a tone of daring that all the others stood aghast at the immensity of the command.

Fatimah departed with many assurances of bringing the lady the next day, and the women set about their simple household duties, each one with a heart lightened because of the singing of the little bird of hope within her.

XVI

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

LINGAPPA'S journeying was of necessity a slow undertaking: but he travelled on bravely from place to place, often foot sore and weary, for it was seldom he obtained even the help of a friendly bullock-cart by the way. He begged a handful of food here and there, or did a little work in return for a meal or a resting-place at night. Always looking for Sundari; but receiving no news concerning her, he began to feel his old weariness returning as the hope of finding his child faded away, and he realized that he had wandered far from the home and companions of his previous lifetime.

One day he reached a village that was inhabited solely by people belonging to the shepherd caste, and he had been received kindly by the simple hearted shepherds whom he had met leading their flocks some miles away from the village to try and find them even the scantiest herdage. He had joined himself to the men, and stayed on in their company all that day, with the result that they had invited him to return with them at night, partake of their poor

provisions, and help in some much needed repairs that were required in the village because the carpenter had been ill some months with a slow fever.

Lingappa, tired of his lonely wandering life, accepted the proffered hospitality of the strangers, and walked back with them, listening to their talk of the expected arrival in their village of some great Englishman.

"Who is the Dhorai coming to the village this evening?" asked Lingappa whose curiosity was aroused by all he had heard.

"We do not know. But his servants came early this morning: they brought with them two bullock-carts quite full of boxes, tents, books, and other things," said a younger member of the little company.

"One of the servants went all through the village to try and buy a chicken, or even a lamb. He wanted milk and vegetables too, and he said they were for his master's breakfast."

"I saw one of the men putting up a white tent, half a mile this side of the village, and when I stopped to watch him at work he told me his master, an English Dhorai was going to live there for some days," chimed in another voice eager to contribute his item of news to the general fund.

Their walk was enlivened by having such an unusual topic of conversation. They speculated upon whom the stranger could be, what he would be like and above all what business had

brought him to their village for some days at least.

Their conversation lasted until they reached the sheep folds, but there it received a sudden check, for sitting on a large stone near to where the flocks were to spend the night, was a beautiful white haired, blue eyed, calm faced stranger who for one second neither moved nor spoke: the shepherds did not connect him with the great Englishman of whom they had been talking, but fancied him some marvellous old yogi whom they had suddenly surprised in the reverent act of holy contemplation, and they paused as though fearful of disturbing one in communion with others, holy and devoted as himself. But their superstitious fancies were soon put to flight, by the supposed yogi rising from his seat, and revealing himself as a vigorous well made man in the prime of life.

His kindly blue eyes twinkled as he saw the impression he had produced upon the minds of the simple untaught shepherds; for astonishment, fear, superstition and reverence chased each other in quick succession across the faces of the men. When he raised his right hand to his forehead, and with the very intonation of their own soft tongue, gave them the customary salutation of "Peace be unto you," his conquest over their rude natures was complete, and they yielded themselves up to the fascination of the hour that followed.

Without being conscious of the fact, they did much of the talking themselves, and even once or twice thought how ignorant their interlocutor must be in the matter of sheep.

"What animals are these?" asked Mr. Burton for it was he who had arrived thus far on one of his itinerating journeys.

Some of the men exchanged glances as one of them replied, "These animals are called sheep."

"Sheep; they look just like goats to me."

"Ah: but you are not used to sheep like we are. We are shepherds, and we should know directly if a goat got into our flocks."

"But are the goats not very much like the sheep? I cannot see much difference."

"They are much the same size and colour, and eat the same food, but their habits are quite different. We who are used to the sheep and goats can easily tell the one from the other."

"What have you been doing all day with your sheep?" was the next innocent question the stranger asked. One man laughed softly, for the venerable appearance of the unexpected apparition awed him, while his question was intensely amusing.

"Doing! why we have been taking them out to find their food. From early this morning, we have been leading them from place to place to get what little grass there is to be found, and now we have brought them back safely for the night."

"Why don't you leave them to find their own food like the dogs, the crows, and the jackals?"

"Because they cannot care for themselves. If we did not feed them, and take them to where the grass grows, and the pools of water are to be found, they would soon die of hunger and thirst."

"I noticed just now, that you counted every sheep as it reached the fold. What was that for?"

"Oh, to see we had our right number. Sometimes a sheep gets lost from the flock, and then we have to go out and look for it until we find it, and bring it back. That is why we count our sheep."

"But would you waste your time, looking for one sheep that had strayed away? What is the value of one sheep compared with the hundreds you have here?"

"Yes, indeed, every one of the flock is too valuable, and too precious to lose sight of."

"Suppose you missed a weak, or a sick one from your flock, would you trouble about that?"

"Those are the ones we have to take the most care of, because they cannot look after themselves: sometimes we carry our sickly lambs for miles, until they are well and strong, and can run with the rest of the flock."

"You seem very kind to your sheep. You take them out to find the best food; you guard them at night. You seek them if they are lost,

and carry them if they are sick. I should think they must always want to stay near you. It must be quite an accident if any of them wander from you so as to get lost."

The English Dhorai was too simple altogether, and the shepherds could not restrain a good laugh this time.

Even Lingappa, the carpenter, saw the joke, for he had witnessed in his one day's company with the sheep and the shepherds, the vigilance that was needed to keep those wandering sheep together.

The Dhorai's mild face assumed a look of surprise at the outburst of unrestrained laughter, and he repeated his question, "Do the sheep ever wander from such kind shepherds as you appear to be?"

"Wander away, O Englishman! I should think they do. Those sheep are absolutely without any sense. It is all that we, and our dogs can do, to keep them together, as we lead them out day by day: they always seem to want to go in a contrary direction, and if one more silly than another tried to run down a side road, the others are sure to want to follow."

"Then of course they must lose themselves sometimes."

"Yes, but we generally find them, unless they are torn by wild beasts, or stolen by the wandering tribes of hill gipsies."

"Ah well! you know your business best, but

it is a mystery to me how you find them, and when you find them how you know them."

"Listen, oh, Dhorai, and I will explain. We search for our sheep in places where they are likely to have strayed. We call them in tones they are familiar with, and often from them we get an answering cry, that leads us in their direction. We know the sound of their bleat, and they know the tone of our voice."

"When you find your wandering sheep, do you punish it, and leave it shut up at home the next day, giving it no food or water?"

Again, the half clad native shepherds exchanged glances which seemed to be challenging each other to deny such an atrocious suggestion. With a touch of scornful pride in his voice because the Englishman did not understand shepherd nature better, the oldest man among them hastened to say,

"Punish them! Oh Dhorai; they are our sheep: they belong to us; we care for them too much to starve or beat them."

The missionary had led his audience up to the point he was aiming at, and in another second the questioner became the inspired guru, and in a flood of simple language, all the more eloquent because of its simplicity, he was pouring out to the astonished shepherds, the application of all the information that they themselves had supplied. In burning words he told them how God, the Great Spirit partook of the character of the

shepherd, and how the men and women of this world were just like the sheep they knew so well.

Even as they cared for their sheep, nourished them, protected them, sought them, called them by name, brought them back from their wanderings, loved them still, so God the Great Good Shepherd of all mankind, sought with tenderness and love those who in their ignorance and folly wandered from Him, trying to choose out their own path.

Like the shepherds too, He planned for the good of His sheep; He knew the sound of their voice: He counted them over to see that none was missing, and rested not day nor night if one were out alone, caught in some thicket of prickly pear, or lying exposed on some rocky elevation, the prey of wild beasts or marauding gipsies.

The parable went home to the hearts of those untutored shepherds, and for the first time in their lives, they had received an entirely new conception of the character of God. They knew well, the destroying God, and the creating God: they knew all about the millions of minor deities whom it was such a task to propitiate, but the Shepherd God was a wonderful new revelation, and such a God appealed to them because He came so into line with the daily thoughts and occupation of all the past years of their lives.

A shepherd God who would not punish for misdemeanours; who would not take their food

from them ; but who would go on caring for them, rescuing them, counting them, calling them by name just as they did their own sheep, was such a stupendous thought that the whole company of shepherds, as well as Lingappa, the stranger, was awed into silence.

The dim stars peeped forth, and shed their pale light over the silvery haired speaker, and over the weird unclad Eastern shepherds sitting in all sorts of uncouth attitudes as their thoughts were led slowly, but surely, onward and upward, until they could almost fancy they heard the tones of the Good Shepherd Himself calling each one by name, to some fold of quietness and rest.

Lingappa's heart beat with a glad new hope, like the joyous note of some happy singing bird, as the truth dawned upon him that the Jesus who gave rest and peace, the Jesus whom the English lady had spoken of, must be the very Good Shepherd who cared enough for His sheep to seek them out until He found them.

The group dispersed. The shepherds to their village homes, and the missionary to his tent whither Lingappa watched him, with the resolve to follow him later on, when the curtain of night should shroud the whole place in darkness. Meanwhile the folded sheep were left to the guardian care of two watchers, and to such silence as a tropical night ever afforded.

XVII

BY DAY AND BY NIGHT

MR. BURTON had left Ballapura, the last day of August, purposing to make a shorter trip than usual so that he might be back at his headquarters station before the celebration of the Dipavali festival for which unusually important preparations were in train.

Millions of people in Southern India accepted with stoical resignation the evil times that shadowed and darkened their beloved land with plague and famine, which to them were the necessary results of the Kali Yuga or age of evil, which was all too slowly running its course. Their hope of deliverance from their present distresses lay in the return of Krishna upon his milk white steed, and to the time when he should suddenly appear as their long promised deliverer, their eager eyes were turned ; but there were almost countless millions in addition to these, who cared not for such far off probabilities as the already long delayed appearance of Krishna. Their attention was concentrated upon things present rather than upon the expectations of the uncertain future.

Krishna certainly would not come until the

end of the Kali Yuga, and who could tell when that would be, whereas Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu, and the goddess of prosperity might be propitiated at the present moment by pandering to her supposed tastes, and making a great display to win her favour, upon the nights of the annual festival partly dedicated to her.

There would be an unusual influx of country people into Ballapura for the celebration, and Mr. Burton wanted to have the entire strength of his mission agents to help him take full advantage of the opportunity thus afforded of reaching the great number of people that would crowd the streets by day in anticipation of the fireworks display when the darkness set in. The shepherd village was his last stopping place for this trip, and he had himself arrived a little in advance of his catechists who could not be persuaded that walking was such a healthy exercise as the Dhorai sought to demonstrate, when they were out on tour.

They were often lost in admiration at the marvellous western energy displayed by Mr. Burton as he swung along the rough roads in the early morning hours, or after the cool of the afternoon had set in, and on the day that the Shepherd Village had been reached, the two catechists had panted and perspired to keep up with the missionary, and finally had lagged behind to ride in calm content on top of the luggage packed behind two slow going bullocks. Two other carts

laden with tents and cooking apparatus, had preceded the party by a good many hours, and when Mr. Burton came in view of the village he was seeking, he was glad to find his tent pitched under a spreading tree, and an appetizing meal ready.

By the time breakfast was over, the sun had mounted so far up into the heavens, that it was folly to think of going out for a few hours, so he sat down to a little camp table, and wrote letters, becoming so absorbed in his occupation that he did not notice the many curious eyes peeping at him through every available aperture. The hours passed by, and there was no sign of the third bullock cart, nor of the catechists who were to accompany him into the village for the open air preaching. But Mr. Burton was a veteran missionary and when he found that his native helpers must have been delayed on their way, he set off alone to view the land round his tent, and thus walked on until he reached the sheep folds where he sat down to wait the coming of his audience ; for he judged the shepherds would be returning with their flocks ere the darkness set in. As he waited he prayed, and while he prayed, the men, whose hearts the Lord was preparing to receive the tiny gospel seed, drew near, halted, and finally filled with wonder they sat down at his feet to receive the message of God's love that he to whom they listened, had travelled hundreds of miles to deliver.

Viewed from the distant village, the site of the missionary's tent could not be mistaken, for the camp-fires over which the cook was busy preparing his master's meal shone out like huge glow-worms.

With such signals, Lingappa felt sure he could not miss his way even in the darkness that had wrapped a mantle of secrecy over the whole place. For once in his life, the blackness of night had a charm for him as he reflected that he could get into the light of the tent without any one being the wiser, and he was not at all sure that he desired the shepherds to know of his intended visit.

His evening meal was dispatched, and his companions became more talkative than was usual with them, for on the whole the shepherds were a silent people. All that the strange English Dhorai had spoken of, was commented upon, and discussed in their simple fashion, until Lingappa feared they would never compose themselves for their night's slumber. Occasionally he turned watchful eyes towards the white tent that gleamed in the light of the camp-fires, and he was relieved to see the dark forms of the servants still moving about.

But as the shepherds talked on, the fires died down, and only the kerosene lamp suspended from the tent pole threw out a sickly light.

It was far on into the night before the anxious carpenter found his opportunity, while others

slept, to get across the compound that separated the village from the little encampment under the spreading tree. He raised himself up cautiously from amongst his sleeping companions, and with a cat-like tread went down the village streets fearful lest that one beacon light should be extinguished before he reached his goal. Once or twice he lost sight of it as the street wound from point to point, and he trembled with fear at the thought he might have delayed too long in starting for the Dhorai's tent.

Nearer and nearer he approached to the friendly light that seemed to beckon him onwards to the protection of its companionship.

He passed three bullock carts, and fancied he could see the figures of men stretched beneath them, but he did not stop to satisfy himself on that point, for it was within the tent that he felt there lay light and hope for him, if he could once get to know more about the shrine of Jesus, the Rest Giver. The voice that still sounded within him seemed to assure him that the master who dwelt in the tent was the one to tell him many things that he longed to know and understand.

The flap of the tent was up, for the night was warm and close, so that Lingappa had a good view of the interior of the most mysterious place he had ever seen. He lay quietly down on his stomach, with his head slightly raised above the ground, so that he might see all without himself being seen.

The camp cot with its mosquito nets tucked carefully in, looked a supernatural object to him, but as he peeped secretly, his eyes wandered from that, and became riveted upon the figure of Mr. Burton, sitting on his camp stool with a small book held in such a position that the rays from the lamp fell right across its pages, while they left his face very slightly in the shadow.

Suddenly, he closed the book, rose, and walked to the tent door. Lingappa was so astonished that he could neither move nor speak for a second, and when he did raise himself from his recumbent attitude, Mr. Burton was so close to him that it was useless for him to try and retire, without speaking.

Full of his great desires, he stood revealed before the missionary, a poor unclothed, unkempt heathen man, with soulful eyes aglow with the yearning awakened by the sound of the soft persistent voice within him. Ever kindly, ever sympathetic, Mr. Burton saw at a glance that this was no marauding visitor whom he had surprised, and in tones of winning sweetness, he said, "Peace be unto thee, O my friend. Come within, and share in the light and protection of the tent."

Lingappa obeyed the invitation, that sounded something of a command as well. As he stepped into the light, he wondered that he had attained his object so easily.

Soon he was seated upon the floor with his glowing eyes fixed upon Mr. Burton, who, by a few judicious questions drew from the man the object of his midnight visit, and little by little he learned the history of the last month of his life which he seemed to date from the first day of Hilda Roi's visit to Lingapura. "No God ever spoke to me like that voice I heard the night my wife died, and when you spoke this afternoon about God being like a shepherd, I wanted to hear more. Show me thy favour, O Dhorai, and tell me more about the Shepherd Swami, and Jesus Swami of whom the lady spoke that day so long ago," concluded Lingappa with a strong appeal in his tired voice and face.

Lingappa was a man in stature and in years, but only a little child in the awakening of his higher faculties, and so as to a child of tender years Mr. Burton explained the wondrous story of the God, who so loved the world, that "He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

With simple forceful words, he told how this God who was so new to the listener on the floor, was good and true; was pure and holy; was loving and kind, and was ever desirous of helping men and women, boys and girls, rich and poor, caste and outcaste to become like Himself in all things.

"I suppose you know this God very well," said Lingappa half deprecatingly.

"Oh, yes," and Mr. Burton's face shone with the remembrance of all the Lord had done for him, "I know Him well and it is because I know Him, I am here to tell you about Him, that you may know Him, and become like Him too."

"From my early childhood, my work has taken me in and out of the temples. I know all the gods by name, yet I never heard of this One who does not delight to annoy and persecute His worshippers. Did you say your God knows all about me, and wants to do me good rather than evil?"

"Yes, Lingappa, my friend. He does know all about you—all your desires, and all your needs. He can read your heart at this very moment, and knows the thoughts that are passing through your mind."

"I never heard anything like this before, and I don't seem to understand what you are saying," he replied despairingly.

Over, and over again, patiently, gently, and wisely Mr. Burton sought to make clear the mystery of God's boundless love, to the man who listened but commented not, upon all he heard. His heart was being stirred to its very depths, as the wonder of it all crept into his soul slowly but surely as midnight darkness glides almost imperceptibly into the grey dawn of early morning ere the sun arises in all the majesty of his glo-

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rious power to chase away the last lingering shadows of daybreak.

"Your words are good; they sound like tom-toms at a wedding feast, carrying with them beats of good fortune for the future," he burst out at last. "But tell me, O wise Englishman, does any one else beside you and the lady know the secret of the God of love?"

"Yes, yes, O Lingappa, many thousands know Him, and have proved Him true to all His promises of love and benediction."

"Tell me of some who know Him."

Willingly but briefly, Mr. Burton told of the natives of India who had become followers of Jesus, of the people in England, and other Christian lands, and even of the good Queen Empress who though so mighty and powerful herself, bowed in humble adoration and love at the feet of the God of love who was also King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The first heralds of morning were at hand, and Lingappa rose with a reluctant sigh as though he would fain have lingered yet awhile. One more question trembled on his lips.

"Have you, and all those others known about the great and True God, only a little while?"

"We have known it all our lives."

"All your life, you are an old man. Your hair is white. You must have lived many years. Are there plenty as old as you, who know all that you have been telling me?"

"Yes, thousands of people, O Lingappa," and in the grey dawn Mr. Burton felt his face burn with shame for the thousands who knew the truth, and withheld the message.

Lingappa's hands clutched nervously, and his face trembled like a little child's about to burst into a cry of distress as he replied, "Thousands know the God of Love, and no one came to tell me the good news before. Salaam, salaam, O great white man. The shadows of night have passed, and the light of breaking day creeps o'er the land," and without another word he stole silently back to the village that was awakening to a new morning.

Attentive crowds listened to the gospel-story that Mr. Burton and his two catechists told upon every occasion during the next two days, and again Lingappa crept like a ghostly visitor to the white tent when darkness had fallen the following night. The third night he came again, but not alone, for like Philip of old he had said to the shepherds, "Come and see." Five of them responded to his invitation, and heard for themselves, the things Lingappa had tried to re-tail to them, of his quiet talks with the Dhorai.

"Send us a teacher," they implored at the end of the interview, "we will listen to him; we will leave our idol gods, and love and serve the True and Living God as soon as we know the way."

XVIII

FATIMAH'S GUEST

WHEN Fatimah left Abu Taleb's household of women, on the afternoon of the day that Sundari had succeeded in interesting her companions up to the point of desiring to see and hear for themselves what Hilda Roi had to say about the One who cared for all women as much as He did for boys and men, the old woman determined to go to the place in the bazaar where Mr. Burton was accustomed to preach, and try to send a message by one of the native men who always stood near the Dhorai. This was her plan, but the more she thought of it, the more nervous she grew, and as she continued her walk, she shrank with the timidity of a Mohammedan woman at the thought of speaking to a strange man, and that man, one of another faith. She drew her veil closer as she got into the more crowded streets, and hardly noticed the familiar way she was taking, so engrossed was she with thinking of what she should do and say to attract the attention of the catechist. Soon the smell of fragrant jessamine flowers told her she must be near the spot, at the far end of the

flower bazaar, from which she could catch sight of the Dhorai's white topee as he stood in the midst of the usual crowd; but when she looked to make sure she was in the right place, she was astonished to see neither crowd nor preacher. There were only just the ordinary buying and selling, quarrelling and bargaining of an Eastern bazaar.

She did not know whether she was disappointed at not seeing the one she sought, or relieved at not having to brace her failing courage up to the point of speaking to an utter stranger in order to send her request to the Englishwoman whom she felt sure must be in some way connected with the Englishman who told of the same kind of friend as Sundari said the lady talked about.

However night was fast approaching, and there was nothing more to be done, but to return to her own quarters, and watch for the passing of the reading-women who visited the houses in the Pettah, and would talk to any one who desired them to do so.

She retraced her steps, walking on, in abstraction, in her new effort to try and plan how to redeem her promise to the gentle Rokaia, and take the English Dhorasani to see her.

It took her nearly an hour to reach her own house, and just as she turned the corner near Ganesa's shrine, she saw in the distance a bullock cart standing at the entrance to her courtyard,

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and she surmised Osman, her lord must have returned home at last. She knew how angry he would be that she was not in, with a good supper awaiting him. She had become used to his long absence, and had certainly trespassed upon it, growing more and more careless about her home duties, as she sunned herself in the light of Sundari's bright young life. Now she told herself she would have to pay dearly for the unwonted liberty she had enjoyed during the past three weeks. Hilda Roi, the missionary, Rokaia, the little Mohammedan wife, Sundari, the beautiful slave girl, and her thrilling stories of Jesus Swami vanished from her mind as she hastened her trembling steps to meet the full force of the torrent of anger she quite expected would burst upon her as soon as Osman should see her ugly old face, for he never forgot to taunt her on her lack of female beauty.

But her fear gave place to astonishment when she drew near the cart, to see two strange men emerge from her dwelling as though undecided what to do next. Their expressionless faces underwent no change on seeing the old woman standing near the cart. They accosted her in Hindustani without as much as making a preliminary salaam, or giving her a respectful title. "Is this the house of Osman, the servant of Abu Taleb, the money-lender of Ballapura?"

"You have arrived at the right house," replied Fatimah salaaming low, and quaking with unde-

finest dread while she waited for what should come next.

"Come then, O my brother," said the one who had first spoken, "let us lift the sick man out, and have finished with all the trouble we have had in bringing him here."

"Good for him he was so well provided with rupees, or he would have shared the same fate as the dog of a servant we left lying dead on the road, ten miles away," said the second man in a harsh voice.

Fatimah was a curious woman now, and no longer the closely-veiled Moslem female who had glided through the streets only a few minutes previously, for she had let fall her heavy outer covering, and was watching with startled eyes, the two men lift from the cart an unconscious form, carry it inside her house, and deposit it upon the dirty lounge that belonged to her own master.

Without any further word of explanation the strange bullock-drivers left the house, and before the old woman could shake off the stupid fear that enthralled her, they were twisting their bullocks' tails encouragingly, and cheering them on to make the best possible speed they were capable of, so as to get away from what they knew to be an unpleasant piece of business.

Fatimah never doubted but what it was her husband who had returned in such an unusually unceremonious fashion. She knew the Hindus,

and the Mohammedans too, often drank toddy and arrack until they lay about quite helpless, but she had never known her master to forget himself in such a way, she whispered, as she approached his prostrate body to find out if there were any smell about him like she had noticed coming from the numerous toddy shops she had to pass on her way through the bazaars.

But it was dark, and she paused to light her tiny wick that floated in a meagre supply of cocoanut oil. With the lamp in her hand, there was a little more assurance in her heart, and she even had time to feel rather glad that Osman had returned in such a state, for would it not give her the opportunity to prepare his meal and have everything in readiness by the time he came to himself? She raised her lamp, and held it over the unconscious form of the man left so summarily in her house. One glance, and the lamp dropped from her hands and she herself uttered a half suppressed cry as she recognized not Osman, her lord, but Abu Taleb her lord's master. The lamp fell with a crash spluttering the hot oil on the upturned face of the luxuriously reared Abu, who stirred and began to mutter incoherently in English, and then to speak more distinctly in his mother tongue. It was dark, and Fatimah knew not where to obtain another light; besides she was benumbed with deadly fear as she crouched listening like one fascinated, to the ravings of the sick man; for she concluded

he must be ill, or he would never toss and turn, and mutter and rave alternately in the way he was doing. Once she thought of trying to touch him to see if he burnt with fever, but she could not tell where his hands lay, and she dare not trust herself to touch in the darkness, any part of his body that might lie nearest to her. The night wore slowly away, and the money-lender raved on of loss and gain, of Osman his servant, of the death dealing plague, and of his determination to reach Ballapura in spite of the authorities in Bombay. "Osman is dead. I tell you he is dead. The accursed plague has devoured him. He is dead, and I shall die too. No, no, I won't have the plague. I won't die. I have money. I will pay you well," shrieked out Abu in a frenzy as the first gray streaks of morning found their way into Fatimah's wretched room.

"The doctor, the doctor, he will cure me; he will save me. I will not die like a pariah dog," and Abu rose with a mighty effort from his miserable divan, only to fall back more exhausted than before.

But his delirious ravings had stirred Fatimah's brain to action, and she rose from her crouching attitude on the hard ground, thinking she would go for a doctor. She stepped out into the lonely morning street uncertain which way to go or whom to call in to see the rich man, lying, in spite of his abundant wealth, an outcast in her poor home. She walked aimlessly on, the entire

length of the street, when in the dim distance she caught sight of a familiar figure, and hurrying her steps she soon overtook a man who proved to be a servant acting in the capacity of confidential factotum to Abdallah, the grain merchant.

The street was deserted save for those two, and so Fatimah accosted the early pedestrian without fear of being seen talking to a man in public. In eager words she poured forth the story of Abu's unexpected arrival the night before, and of all the terror she had experienced through the hours of darkness as she listened to his terrible mutterings and ravings.

The man showed no emotion at what he heard, but promised to tell his master, Abdallah, and seek his advice about obtaining the help of a doctor; at the same time he advised her to return home, and not to tell any of the neighbours of the sick man's presence in her house.

Osman's wife did return, and now that daylight had come to chase away some of the phantoms of night, she set to work to prepare some coffee, thinking Abu might drink a little: but when she carried it to his side, she had another accession of fear as she noted his bloated face, and his glazed eyes. His mutterings had almost ceased, and he lay passive, as though too weak now to resist any longer the grim spectre of death with which he had fought all through the hours of night.

It was drawing near the midday hour when

the sound of quick running wheels was heard in the streets, and a carriage drew up at Osman's humble dwelling. Another minute, and the stately white bearded old Abdallah crossed the lowly threshold. Closely following him came a bright faced young Englishman, who as soon as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom of the place, crossed quickly to where the sick man lay, glanced at him professionally, touched his pulse lightly, laid his hand on his heart, and then struck a match to take a closer look at the face which was quickly assuming a gray, ashy pallor visible even upon the Mohammedan's olive skin. Apparently the doctor was satisfied, for he turned to the silent Abdallah, who had watched his proceedings with a keen eye, and said, " Sahib, I am sorry to say I am too late to save your friend ; a few minutes more, and he will be gone," and under his breath he whispered as though to himself, " May the Lord have mercy upon us. The first case of plague has appeared in our midst."

The two men lingered, Abdallah in fear, and the doctor in pity for the man whose life was fast ebbing away ; but the lingering was of short duration, for in five minutes after their arrival, Abu Taleb, the prosperous, the exacting money-lender of Ballapura had breathed his last within the friendly shelter of Osman's poor home. Abdallah turned to flee, as the truth forced itself upon him ; but the young doctor stretched forth a detaining hand, and said, " O Sahib, you

have come into contact with the plague; you must be thoroughly disinfected at once, and undergo a medical examination every day for the next ten days. Do not leave this house until I return," and trusting to the venerable looking old man's honour, the doctor hurried off to give due notice of the strange merchant's arrival from Bombay, and his subsequent death from plague, for Abdallah had not revealed the identity of the dead man.

Now the municipality of Ballapura had long held itself in readiness for an invasion of the plague, and so it came to pass that in less than an hour from the reported death of Abu Taleb, a score of workers was in Osman's house, burning all it contained, disinfecting, cleansing and purifying the floors, walls, and ceiling to the best of their ability.

The dead body of the supposed merchant was placed in a prepared grave, under the supervision of the doctor, a few native policemen, and two or three government officials who were there to see that all necessary precautions were taken.

Poor old Fatimah was in an agony of distress at seeing the wholesale destruction of all her home contained, and she felt she could bear any indignity that was afterwards thrust upon her when she was taken away to be immured, a solitary occupant of the segregation camp that had been prepared in readiness for just such an emergency as had that day occurred in Ballapura.

The last glimpse that she ever caught of her old home was, as she lifted the hastily improvised purdah in front of the bullock cart that was conveying her away, a policeman in the act of putting a large red cross with the letter " P " beneath it, right in the centre of the house-door.

It had all happened so suddenly. The return of Abu ; his death and burial ; the destruction of all she held so dear, and now her own hurried departure to the plague camp, that she told herself over and over again it was all a horrible dream from which she would surely awaken.

Abdallah was not to be trusted. The doctor had erred in leaving him for one moment alone ; for no sooner had the sound of his carriage wheels died away in the distance than Abdallah's mind was made up, and like his partner Abu, he determined to flee from the place of death.

With all haste he hurried off home, secured some money and valuables, and without a word to any one hastened to the railway station, took the first outgoing train, and was soon being carried far away from the scene of horror he had just witnessed.

XIX

SUNDARI'S VENTURE

“SUNDARI, Sundari,” called Rokaia’s sweet voice, “where are you? It grows very dark, and I do not like being alone. Sundari, Sundari.”

“I am here, my jewel. O Rokaia, my sister, I will not leave thee. No, not for one moment. You have been kind to me. I will stay with thee,” and she gently stroked the thin hand of the little Rokaia who seemed to grow weaker every day.

“Sundari, my little one, how long is it since old Fatimah said she would bring the white Mem Sahib to see me, and other women?”

“Three days ; and Fatimah has not returned. All the women say she has never been away so long before.”

“That is true. Fatimah has come every day since I have lived here. I wonder why she does not return ; surely she has fever, or she would certainly come.”

“She must be looking all this time for the white lady. You know she promised to bring her. I am sure she will come as soon as she

finds her, for Fatimah is good and kind, she loves you, my Rokaia, even as I do."

"I wish, oh how I wish that she would come. I want to hear from her own lips all that she told you and the other people that day in Lingapura. Can't you remember the words she sang, little Sundari?"

"Alas! no. I only heard them once."

"Tell me over again, what you think she said; while I listen to your voice it keeps me from being too tired. The God, who gives love, and peace and rest, must be very wonderful. I would that I knew more of Him."

Sundari set herself right willingly to the task of pouring into Rokaia's attentive ears all that came to her of Hilda Roi's words spoken that last bright afternoon she had spent in her own village. Rokaia had heard them over and over again, but the mere repetition of the story soothed her and she lay with her large sunken eyes fixed upon the small face of the young narrator with such intensity, that their glowing depths urged Sundari to draw upon her own imagination, and so add a few items that neither Hilda nor her companions had included in their afternoon's preaching.

"Jesus Swami, who gives joy and peace to all women, and rest to the tired ones, lives somewhere close to the English Dhorasani. He is too great a God to go out of His beautiful temple, Mosque do you call it, O Rokaia. He is also

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too great to live in any of the images that our priests consecrate. He is so big that no car that was ever made in India could hold Him, and so even His worshippers cannot take Him out on festival days to get an airing. To be dragged through the streets on cars is good enough for the less important gods, but Jesus Swami always stays at home, and that is the reason why those who want the rest, the joy and the peace, have to go to Him. I remember quite well that the Dhorasani sang,

‘Come near to Jesus, and be at rest.’

You see, my Rokaia, if He were not so very great, we could make a little image, call it Jesus Swami, ask the priest to call the god into it, and then you could go near to it, and then—and then——” but Sundari faltered slightly, for she was not sure of the next idea she was about to propound, “and then you would go near enough to touch the image with your hands, or perhaps hold it, like you are holding my hands, and you would be quite well, the tired feeling would go, and you would be bright and happy like the singing birds in the lime trees at Lingapura.”

Sundari had made a supreme effort with her inventive genius, for the sake of the companion, rather than the mistress whose patience and gentleness had won all the wealth of love her untamed heart was capable of. She only paused to draw a deep breath of satisfaction, before

setting forth a few more vague ideas, when Rokaia interrupted her. "Oh, Sundari, my beautiful one. Images and idols are worth nothing. You should not talk of them as if they were really gods. God who is the Great and Eternal Spirit never condescended to take up His abode in a clay or wooden image. There is no God, but God, and Mahomet is His prophet. So I have often heard my father say when I lived happily in Madras."

"Well," continued Sundari, nothing daunted at Rokaia's attempt to correct her heathen ideas, "well, I said Jesus Swami is too big, and great to live inside an idol, and so could not be brought to you, and it is certain you cannot go to Him, for you are ill and weak; and even if you were strong like I am, you could not go, because you must not break your caste by going into the streets."

"Tell me, O Rokaia, have you never been out, and seen the bazaar, and the trees, the big rocks, and the shining river?"

"No, no, Sundari, such sights are not for women like me. I don't know what a river is. I never heard of one until you came here and told me of the one near your home. When you talk about the shining river and the bed of stones, I do not understand. But do not talk of me. Let us think how I can get to Jesus Swami," and the entreaty in her voice caused Sundari to pucker up her little brow in thoughtful contemplation.

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"If the lady only knew how much you wanted to come to Jesus, and be at rest, she might tell Him about you, and perhaps as He loves everybody, He might come to you, as you cannot go to Him," she ventured at length.

"Yes, something tells me that He would come, if He only knew how much I wanted to see Him. Sundari, I think I shall die soon, and I would like to see this friend of the English lady's, before Azrail snatches me away."

While she spoke, Sundari received an inspiration which betrayed itself in the quick withdrawal of her hands from Rokaia's caressing fingers, and the new decision of her voice as she said, "O Rokaia, I will go out, I will find Fatimah, and she shall take me to the English lady. I will tell her all about you, and her white heart will be filled with pity when she hears you are sick, and longing for rest, and just one look into the face of her Jesus before you die."

Rokaia was startled, and raised herself on her elbow to look searchingly into the face of her child companion. What she saw there, calmed her own fears, for her heart had bumped and throbbed at the immensity of the proposal, for her knowledge of the manners and customs of Moham-medan women made her shrink from the thought of allowing even the little slave girl to expose herself to the awful temptations that lay waiting beautiful and unguarded females in the wicked atmosphere of the open bazaars.

Alas! Poor little Gosha wife! She only knew what her own mother, herself a veiled lady had taught her in the privacy of her own home.

But Sundari's mind was made up, and lest Rokaia should seek to turn her from her purpose, she set her mouth firmly, stopped talking, and began to sing instead a weird cradle song with which the village mothers of Lingapura often used to send their babies off to sleep. She sang softly, and to such a good purpose, that soon Rokaia's heavy lids dropped over her luminous eyes, and the tired girl slept more soundly than she had done for days. This was the opportunity Sundari sought, and she moved quietly away from the lounge where Rokaia lay, and peeped cautiously round to see how the other women were engaged. Satisfied on this point that none of them would see her she quickly divested herself of her petticoat and jacket, and in place of them she wound a dirty white outer covering around her, in the simple village style she was accustomed to. She pulled one end of the improvised sari over her black rippling hair, and with a last half frightened look at the sleeping Rokaia, made her way stealthily out of the woman's apartments thinking to slip out the way Fatimah had brought her in more than three weeks earlier; but she must have taken a wrong passage, for she found herself in quite an unknown part of the house. She glanced anxiously round to find some means of exit; for she

was afraid to return the way she had come lest she should meet some of the women. As she stood for one second undecided as to which way to turn, a door hidden by a curtain opened, and a man, whom in the half light she thought to be Osman, the Mussulman, crossed the room, leaving the door ajar behind him, and letting in a stream of daylight, beneath the curtain. It was the work of a moment to dart through the open door which led into the outer office of Abu Taleb's business establishment, rush past a clerk half dozing at his post, and thus get into the busy bazaar where her flying feet soon carried her beyond the reach of any pursuers who might take the trouble to find out who she was, and what she was doing. But there was no fear of this, for the man who had opened the door of liberty for the child, was too astonished at the rapidity of her action to move for a few seconds, And when he did recover himself sufficiently to go and ask the sleepy clerk in the office if he had seen a little beggar maid rush past him into the street, he only received the angry reply from the newly aroused sleeper, that the holy prophet must have favoured him with a supernatural vision.

XX

FREEDOM

SUNDARI experienced a delightfully thrilling sensation surging through and through her, when she paused in the midst of a crowd of her own country people, to draw breath, and to recover herself a little after the altogether unexpected dash she had made for liberty.

To breathe the outer air even of the stifling bazaar was like a waft from her own village.

The heated and perfumed air of the harem had oppressed her terribly, without her really knowing what she longed for. Three weeks of confinement, shut out from the sight of the blue sky above her, and the brilliant sunshine around her, had robbed her of some of her sprightliness; but once in the open air again, her freedom of limb came back. The new sights and sounds on every side put fresh life into her, and she felt, she could even defy Osman, the Mussulman, should she be so unfortunate as to meet him.

Not a qualm of fear touched the village child, who all her short life had been accustomed to roam the village streets at will, and when she

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saw other girls her own age, standing at the bazaars, bargaining with the vendors or dodging in and out amongst the indifferent masses that crowded the narrow thoroughfares, she felt renewed confidence in her own powers to find old Fatimah's house.

As soon as she knew herself to be some distance from Abu's house, and safe from pursuit, she slackened her pace, and went along more comfortably, with an assured air of knowing her own business, and so no one interfered with her. She had made good use of her eyes when Fatimah had conducted her to her new home, and so she began to note one sign after another as guides to the Mohammedan street she was seeking.

She passed slowly through the grain bazaar which was packed with such a dense mob of men that she had great difficulty in threading her way between them. Every now and again, she heard stray remarks about the forthcoming Dipavali festival; the high price of grain, and the starving condition of the people. But she pressed on giving no attention to what others seemed so absorbed in. The Dipavali did not interest her, and she wanted to reach Fatimah's house.

Through Cloth Bazaar, along Flower Street, on she went, and then her child's heart succumbed to the temptation of lingering awhile in Bangle row.

"Oh, the lovely bangles!" she exclaimed in

an ecstasy of delight, while her eyes assumed for the moment, something of the old star-like look that had so entranced Osman. What a bewildering array it was : Glass bangles of every conceivable colour. Blue, green, pink, of all shades, plain and variegated. Wax, adorned with gold and silver paper. Cheap bangles, and expensive bangles. There they were, displayed to full advantage in attractive and glittering profusion. Such a wealth of bangles had never before greeted Sundari's eyes.

Fortunate women and girls sat, enduring the most exquisite tortures, in having the gay baubles passed over their hands that were far too large for the tiny circlet they would persist in choosing to adorn their smooth brown arms. But Hindu hands proved pliable as a bit of putty under the skillful manipulation of the expert bangle-man ; and Sundari joined with childish abandon in the satisfaction of the tortured ones when an extra small bangle was coaxed over an extra plump hand, and rested as a tight fitting band on the wrist. All at once her pleasure departed, for she was roused from her admiration of the bangles by the rumble of approaching cart-wheels, and turning round quickly, she saw to her dismay the mission cart that had been to Lingapura, and inside it the face of the lady she was looking for.

She followed her first impulse, and began to run after the fast vanishing cart, but her attempt

was useless, for "Billy" the pony was on his best behaviour, and it was all the horse-keeper could do, to keep from running over some of the people in the street. By constant screaming, shouting and lashing out with his whip he did keep the course clear, and thus left the pursuing Sundari far behind. In her attempt to overtake the cart, she had missed her sign post of the big temple covered with thousands of small idols, that was only two streets away from the Mohammedan part of the Pettah.

There was no help for her, but to go back to Bangle Bazaar, and make a new start, and back she went with all the resolution of her determined little character.

To her delight after a very long walk, she found the temple, and then with renewed energy, her feet were soon treading the way that led directly to Fatimah's door. Her errand was nearly completed, and it was with a sense of pleasure she anticipated seeing Fatimah's friendly old face.

Another half dozen steps, and her willing little feet came to a standstill, and she was gazing with perturbed eyes at the closed up house with the big red cross daubed on the door.

What did it mean? Had she after all made a mistake? Was this the wrong street? She looked round and round. Every door stood open except the one she wanted to go in at, and

that was fast closed. She looked up the street, and down the street with eyes that became dimmed and blurred however much she blinked them.

Her inspiration no longer upheld her; her endurance had come to an end; the English lady and her Jesus had eluded her. The reflection proved too much for her, and she sank weeping bitterly upon the deserted pial of the plague stricken house.

The great heat of midday was long since past, and Sundari had not lain crying very long before the women of the neighbouring houses began to move about in preparation for their evening meal.

One and another passed by the sobbing child, but took no notice except to warn her to move away from where she was lying as the house had been visited by plague. "What was plague?" she wondered. Perhaps a new kind of devil that lived only in Ballapura. With this idea, she sat up, and sought to stop the flow of tears, and to ask the woman who had spoken to her, if she knew aught of Fatimah, the wife of Osman.

The question was only needed to draw out from the poor woman all the indignation pent up within her because of the summary fashion in which the government officials had acted with regard to Osman's house and property. She together with the rest of the inhabitants of the street lived in hourly terror of being carried

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away like their old neighbour Fatimah to the dreaded segregation camp.

Gradually many women and children grouped themselves around Sundari, glad to find another attentive ear to the recital of their wrongs and their fears, for every house in the street had been visited by the police, and an army of workers with their dreadful disinfectants.

The child listened in benumbed wonder to the story of the arrival of the sick stranger at Fatimah's house; of his death and hurried burial; of his assertion that Osman the Mussulman had died of plague in Bombay, and of the burning and disinfecting process carried on under the very eye of the English doctor. When the women directed her to look up at the closely-barred door with its flaming red cross upon it, as a proof of all they said, she turned shudderingly to obey them; but soon dropped her eyes from the sight, and wailed out in utter despair, "Oh Rokaia! My beautiful Rokaia! Fatimah has gone, and who will bring Jesus to you now?"

As far as the Mohammedan women were concerned her words were quite unheeded, for they were too absorbed in their own troubles to enquire any further into the miserable condition of the little Hindu girl who was not even of their own faith. While Sundari moaned over Rokaia's disappointment when she would return only to say she had failed in her mission, the attention of the Moslem women around her was

diverted into another channel, for the word had gone round that the English doctor with two policemen had appeared for his afternoon's inspection of the houses. The women drew their veils a little closer, and disappeared like passing shadows, within the shelter of their homes, leaving Sundari the sole occupant of the pial in front of the marked house. The young doctor, with his firm military tread approached where she lay, and stopped abruptly in his surprise, at seeing the Hindu child lying in her grief upon such a dangerous spot.

For the first time since leaving Lingapura, Sundari heard the soft tones of her beloved Kanarese, as he said in foreign accents,

"My little one, you must not lie there. Come, get up, and let me feel your pulse," and he smiled to reassure her even though he felt anxious lest she had inadvertently run into danger.

Sundari obeyed him, and stood quite passively, as he looked at her tongue, and felt her pulse, and told her she was all right for the present, but that she had better not venture into such a dangerous place again.

"What is your name, and where do you live?" he asked her kindly. "I will come and see you to-morrow to make sure you are still well. You see I am a doctor, and I should not like a bright little maiden like you to take the plague."

"I am Sundari, the daughter of Lingappa the carpenter."

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"And where does Lingappa the carpenter live, my little one?"

"Our village is called Lingapura."

"Lingapura; where is that? I never heard of it before."

"Lingapura is near a river that flows with much water in the Monsoon season, but now it is dried up and there are only a few water-holes to be found." The directions were too vague for the doctor, and so he put another question.

"Why are you so far away from Lingapura, and your father, the carpenter?"

He looked so kind, and the way he used the soft, sweet Kanarese words made her think of the white lady whom she was seeking, and she burst out in her own impetuous little way,

"O white man, I have come to find Jesus to take Him to my little Rokaia. She is ill, and may not come out. She cannot come to Him to find rest and peace, and I am looking for some one who will tell Jesus about my Rokaia."

"Ah, my little one, Jesus is my friend. I can help you. Will you be afraid to come with me?"

"Will you take me to Jesus? Do you think He will go to Rokaia when He hears about her?"

For a moment, the young man stood abashed before the sweet pleading eyes, and the tender little dark face of the Hindu child, as like a lightning flash there passed through his mind a

review of his life since he had landed in India, and how his ability to lead others to Jesus had rather decreased than increased. His confession that Jesus was his friend had been made more falteringly than Sundari suspected, for he half wondered if he had any right to call Him by such a sweet name after neglecting Him so much.

"I can take you to a lady who will, I am sure, go to see your Rokaia. Will you come with me?" was his answer.

"Yes, yes, I will come."

He bade her follow him to a carriage that was waiting at the entrance of the street, and told her to sit in it until his return.

In reality she waited an hour, but it seemed only a few minutes, so intensely glad was she that she was within measurable distance of fulfilling her promise to Rokaia.

The doctor's horses were good ones, and his carriage bowled pleasantly along for two or three miles through the bazaars and then out on a country road, until a large rambling old building was reached and the horses turned into the drive that led to the Mission House.

For the second time in her life, Sundari fancied she must have changed places with some one else, for as the horses came to a standstill, the very English lady of all her desires emerged from the shady veranda, and she witnessed the most curious greeting imaginable. She laughed

quietly behind her drawn sari, as the grotesqueness of the whole proceeding struck her keen imagination.

The doctor lifted his hat from his head, and then held out his hand which the lady took in one of hers, and they both smiled as the gentleman began to talk in an unknown tongue. If Sundari could have understood what was being said, she would have heard, "Good-afternoon, Miss Roi, I am glad to find you in. I have brought you a visitor who will explain her own errand better than I can. I found her in the street where the plague broke out, three or four days ago. But I don't think you need be afraid. She seems a very healthy little specimen."

A few words from Miss Roi, in the same unintelligible style, and the doctor once more raised his hat, turned and made a parting salaam to Sundari, jumped into his carriage and was gone.

XXI

A SONG AT MIDNIGHT

HILDA ROI did not recognize the little girl who had been so suddenly introduced to her by the young military doctor of whom she had but a passing knowledge, and so, as he drove away, she turned to Sundari who stood motionless taking in every detail of the strange place in which she found herself, and said, "I am very glad to see you, my little one. You must tell me who you are, and why you have come here."

Sundari's heart glowed within her at the kind words, but her mouth seemed dumb, and strive as she would, she could not force herself to speak.

She had been exceedingly brave in the thought of seeking out the only one who could help Rokaia. She had dared much in escaping from the harem, and wandering through the streets of an unknown town; but all her bravery had centred in the finding of Fatimah, who was to be the connecting link between herself, Rokaia, and the English lady. The contingency of having to make her purpose known to the Dhorasani herself had never once entered into her plans, and now that Hilda's kindly brown eyes were looking

down upon her, and the never to be forgotten foreign accent of her Kanarese sounded in her ears, a strange perverse shyness overcame her, and she was mute from sheer nervousness. She drew her sari well up over her head and looked upon the ground, while she fidgetted about in the most approved style of Hindu maidenly decorum until Hilda knew it was hopeless to expect an answer, and so she made another attempt to win her confidence by saying, "Come with me, and you shall see my girls; some of them are as small as you are," and she moved off in the direction of the girls' home. If Sundari could not find the use of her tongue, her feet proved more amenable to her will power, and Hilda smiled happily as she heard behind her the patter of bare feet upon the concrete floor of the verandah. It was only a few steps across the compound to the home, and soon another unusual sight greeted Sundari's eyes.

Girls of all ages were in the school compound. Some were busy preparing the evening meal: others were in groups learning their lessons for the next day, and a few were gathered round the most astonishing piece of mechanism that the world had ever produced. Sundari described it afterwards to Rokaia, as two thick poles of bamboo with rope hanging from the top till it nearly reached the ground. In a way she could not detect, a girl was fastened to the rope, and was being tossed up and down into the

air by a bigger girl, while all the others laughed with delight, and clamoured loudly to be the next one to be sent up and down.

Miss Roi's appearance was the signal for all the girls to greet her. Those who were sitting rose to their feet; others put down their water pots, and the group around the swing dispersed, while "Salaam Amma, Salaam Missyamma," was heard from one and all.

"Salaam, Salaam," returned Hilda touching her forehead with her right hand. "I have brought this little girl to see you. Give her some supper, and try to make her happy for a few hours. Where is Nilamma?"

"Nilamma is in the matron's room, mending some clothes," answered two or three voices at once.

"Thank you. I want to speak to her. Krupai and Ratna, take charge of my little friend," and Hilda went in search of Nilamma, leaving Sundari to make herself at home amongst the school children.

But Sundari had not accomplished her purpose. It was the white woman she wanted, and not this crowd of children so like her own village companions except for their look of cleanliness, and happy content.

She made an attempt to run after Miss Roi, and gasp out her request that she would go at once and see Rokaia, but an interruption came from one of the girls.

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"Little sister, would you like a swing?" asked the bright faced Ratna, and she drew the reluctant Sundari towards the mysterious upright bamboo rods.

Meanwhile Hilda had found Nilamma, one of her elder girls in whom she reposed much confidence because of her bright helpful ways, and her happy consistent Christian life.

To her she told the circumstances of the strange child's arrival, and finished by saying,

"Dear Nilamma, if any one can overcome her shyness, I am sure you can. Try and find out her object in coming here, this afternoon, and then you can tell me, and we will see how we can help her."

Nilamma laid her sewing on one side, and joined the children round the swing where Sundari's curly head, and bright eyes soon attracted her.

With gentle persuasion she drew her aside, and began showing her first one thing, and then another, interesting her in the preparations for supper, in the water carrying from the deep well, and in the various tasks that the girls were busily performing.

"I can carry water," were the first words Sundari's loosened tongue uttered as she watched six or seven girls coming up the seventy steps leading from the well.

"If you stay with us, we will let you carry

some every day," replied Nilamma, glad that the silence between them was broken.

"Oh, but I can't stay. I must go back to my Rokaia. She will be awake long ago, and wanting me to get her evening meal ready. I must go now, at once. Nilamma, Nilamma, take me back," and she looked appealingly into the elder girl's kind face.

"You must have some supper first, and then I will go and tell our Missyamma what you say. I am sure she will send you back if you only tell her where you live.

"Look at that pretty bungalow with all the green leaves growing over it. Burton Dhorai lives there. But he is out in the country now, telling the village people all about the true God, and Jesus Christ, His only son," said Nilamma, hoping to divert the child's attention. The chords of love for Rokaia were set in motion again by the one word Jesus in Nilamma's long speech, and Sundari almost gasped out, "Jesus: where does Jesus live? My Rokaia wants to see Jesus and I am looking for some one to take Him to her."

Once more the name of Jesus had proved potent to charm away fear, and all shyness, and thus it came to pass that long before supper was ready Nilamma was in possession of all Sundari's history from the day of Hilda Roi's first visit to Lingapura. The Christian girl's eyes filled with tears at the thought of the little Mohammedan

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wife's longing to see and know for herself Jesus, the friend of women, and she could hardly restrain her impatience to rush straight away and beg Miss Roi to go without delay wherever Sundari might lead her.

"Little Sundari, will you come with me—and tell our Missyamma everything? I am sure she will go and see your Rokaia. She will tell her all about our Lord Jesus, and perhaps she can give her medicine that will help her to grow well and strong again," said Nilamma.

"But Rokaia does not want to get well. She wants rest and peace. She wants to see Jesus before she dies, and ask Him to let her live in His beautiful home in Kailasa."

Hilda had been very busy all day, and when she returned from her visit to the school, she lay down in her long basket chair, and gave herself up to the luxury of half an hour's relaxation.

She was conscious of plenty that awaited her attention; but she left all, and revelled in the bliss of inaction as far as it could be inaction when her brain would run riot over ways, and means; work and workers. Her half hour passed, and she rose, thinking to get a book and read until dinner time: she was standing in front of her bookcase wondering which book would be the most efficacious in chasing away the thoughts of mission work and its attendant circumstances when through the window she espied Nilamma coming towards the bungalow; and

wonder of wonders, she was actually leading the little stranger by the hand.

Hilda left the bookcase, saying, "Something tells me Nilamma's story will be far more interesting than any book I have here," walked back to the verandah in time to receive the two children.

Nilamma's face was radiant with success, and Sundari's dark eyes sparkled like diamonds in motion in anticipation of the result of the news Nilamma was to communicate.

With the pretty demureness that Hilda loved to see, Nilamma unfolded her story with Sundari's hand clasped confidently in hers all the time, and so interested did the child become, that her shyness of the English lady vanished, and she joined in Nilamma's pleading that at once they might all start out, find Rokaia, and relieve her of all anxiety concerning Sundari, and at the same time tell her of Him whom she greatly desired to see and know.

Hilda's heart throbbed in unison with those of the children, and so it needed no coaxing on their part for her to decide to start off as soon as the horse and the jutka could be got ready.

Meanwhile she sent Nilamma and Sundari back to school to have some supper, while she herself asked the cook to bring her at once whatever dinner was ready.

Soon the happy Sundari was seated in the mission jutka beside the English missionary, and

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Hilda only diverted her course to the house of Abu Taleb, by driving to the mission compound to ask Ruth, the Bible woman, to accompany her on her errand of love.

The streets looked very different to the bewildered child, from what they did in the broad sunshine of midday, and so it was well that Ruth, and the driver of the jutka knew their way to the house of the wealthy sowcar, for Sundari was too puzzled to be able to act as guide herself.

Through Bangle Bazaar, and down Flower Street deserted in the darkness, Billy sped in good earnest, but when he reached the Vegetable Market, he refused to stir another step. The driver coaxed him, whipped him, and coaxed him again, but all to no purpose. He either stood quite still, or backed into the pials of the houses with such determination of purpose that Hilda had no alternative, but to alight, and go the rest of the way on foot.

The streets were narrow and dark, and although the inside of the harem had grown so familiar to Sundari, she could not recognize the outside, but Ruth thought they must have arrived at the right place, and she suggested that Sundari should go on a voyage of discovery, and if it were the house they sought, prepare the ladies for their arrival.

"You must come too, I told Rokaia I would bring you," said Sundari as she felt more as-

sured of her position after getting accustomed to the house in the darkness, and she led Hilda and Ruthamma on through the passages and rooms, until the faint glimmer of lights, and the sound of voices proclaimed the nearness of the women's apartments.

The unwearied feet of Sundari tripped lightly on, until she raised a heavy purdah, behind which an unusually bright lamp was burning, revealing the recumbent figure of a girl on a more comfortable lounge than Hilda had ever seen in a native house.

"Rokaia, Rokaia," burst out Sundari in glad accents. "The English lady has come. I have brought her to you." It was Hilda's first introduction into a Mohammedan home, and natural curiosity would have prompted her to look round, and get some idea of the surroundings of the shut-in women of whom she had heard much. She had formed her opinions of Moslem women by those of the lower orders that she had seen walking through the bazaars, but this pale, refined, exquisitely dressed young girl was a being of quite another sort, and instinctively she lowered her voice, and shut out every thought of the strangeness of her own position, as she knelt on the floor beside the divan, and said, "My little sister, are you ill? What can I do for you?"

"I don't know whether I am ill. I am tired, always tired. Are you the white lady who knows about Jesus?"

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“ Yes, I know Jesus. He is my friend, my Saviour, and my King. Would you like to know Him too ? ”

“ Yes, yes, Mem Sahib. Tell me all you told the people in Lingapura. My Sundari has told me all that she remembers, but it does not all come back to her.” And she turned her eyes melting with love upon the little slave girl who sat stroking her pale brown hand.

Hilda too, looked at the little captive maid, and her heart went out in tenderness towards her, as she recognized in her God's messenger to one of the daughters of darkened India.

And so Hilda began, and told out once again, but for the first time in that Mohammedan harem, the story of the Saviour's redeeming love, and as the tones of her voice penetrated other rooms, the heavy purdah was again and again drawn on one side to admit silent and wondering women who slipped into the room, and curled themselves up in comfortable attitudes as they settled themselves down to listen for as long as Hilda liked to talk.

Rokaia fixed her luminous eyes on the face of the missionary, and gazed at her with an entranced expression, but not a word did she utter, until Hilda paused at the end of almost an hour's description of how God desired all should come to Him through the merits of Jesus Christ His well-beloved Son.

“ Are you quite sure He wants Moslem women

as well as white women like you?" at length she asked.

"Yes, I am perfectly sure He wants Moslem women, Hindu women, and white women too, because one part of His Holy Word says, 'Who-soever will, may come, and take of the water of life freely,' and so you, and every one else must be included in that invitation," was Hilda's unhesitating reply; "but my little one are you not very tired? I will come again at a more convenient time, and seek your husband's permission to instruct you regularly."

"Yes, yes, come again," was the echo of many voices. "Must you go now? You sang to the people at Lingapura, and played some wonderful music," came in timid accents from one of the women.

Hilda detected the desire of the woman in her faltering words, and said, "I will sing to you if you would like me to."

"Yes, yes," they cried, clapping their hands in childish glee. "Sing the words Sundari could not remember, about coming to Jesus," and they all looked at the child to help them out.

Sundari was at home, and holding the hand of her beloved Rokaia who trembled with delight in anticipation of the singing, she quickly explained what it was they all wanted to hear.

Hilda remembered quite well what she had sung in Lingapura, and soon in the darkened room, for the lamp had burnt low, the sweet

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words of invitation to tired, and weary ones floated out on the heavy midnight air.

“ Art thou weary, art thou languid,
Art thou sore distressed ?
Come to me, saith One, and coming
Be at rest.”

As the singer finished, Rokaia drew a breath of deepest satisfaction, and said, “ It is all very beautiful. I wish some one had told me years ago, when I could have understood it better than I do now. I don't think I feel quite so tired, dear Mem Sahib. Please come again soon.”

Many were the farewell salaams given to Hilda and Ruthamma, as they left the harem, and stepped into the deserted streets of Ballapura.

It was early morning ere the mission house was reached, and the first day of the Dipavali festival had dawned.

XXII

THE DIPAVALI

THE first day of the celebration of the feast of lamps had dawned, and the inhabitants of Ballapura were all in a state of great activity with all the preparations attendant upon the forthcoming Dipavali.

Mr. Burton had returned safely from his trip into the district, and was busy organizing his force of catechists and evangelists so as to reach many of the thousands who would flock into Ballapura, during the five days set apart for celebrating Vishnu's victory over Narakasur, the giant, and for propitiating Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity.

Their work would be in the open streets, and in the bazaars where Mr. Burton hoped to have preaching carried on from early morning until the darkness of night set in.

His arrangements were completed at last, and the important day to which he and thousands of people in Southern India had looked forward, broke with an unusual sultriness, with not a passing cloud to dim the sun's rays, or mar the brilliancy of the azure sky.

Mr. Burton, and two of his catechists started

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out about seven o'clock to be in good time at the first preaching station, and as he passed Miss Roi's house, he paused to say good-morning, and to tell her his plans for the day.

"I suppose you will not be visiting in the Hindu houses," he said.

"No, the Bible women say it is almost useless to attempt to gain a hearing from the women this week. When you are not so hurried I want to tell you of a visit I paid last night to a Mohammedan house. Ruthamma has brought me an invitation from one of her pupils, to go to her house, and see the preparations for the festival. Would it be an influence for good or evil if I went?"

"I think I would advise you to go. It is good to show an interest in these people apart from our set purpose in going to see them. There is nothing like actual experience of the ways, and customs of our Hindu friends whom we are seeking to bring to the knowledge of our Saviour, for bringing us into sympathetic touch with them. Yes, I should go by all means. An intelligent knowledge of the beliefs of those who indulge in the practices of the Dipavali, and other festivals may be very useful to you in after days."

"Thank you so much. If you think thus about it I will certainly go: but my own thought was whether my presence might not seem like countenancing their absurd beliefs."

"Not at all. Going once to gain information and experience for the purpose of coming into more sympathetic relations with the women, is quite different from frequenting the festivals for your own amusement. Why do you wear those bangles? Surely they are new ornaments for you."

Hilda smiled, as she glanced at the Hindu bangles on her wrists and replied,

"Oh, the bangles are not ornaments; they are a link between me and the native women and girls. The very sight of them proves to them I am both human and feminine even as they are. Once I heard a man remark to his neighbour about me, 'Oh yes, it is all right. She must be a woman for she wears bangles like our women;' and I have always had the feeling that on that afternoon my bangles secured me an attentive audience."

"Well, I do not think you need have any more scruples over visiting at the house of the one who has sent for you to see her preparations for the festival, than you have in wearing your bangles. But I would advise you to return home early, before the people get too riotous. I have an uneasy presentiment that all is not well in Ballapura just at present. I did not like the sullen faces of hundreds of villagers whom I saw loitering about the streets yesterday. They looked altogether different from the crowds who have flocked in from a love of pure pleasure. But I

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must go. Good-bye," and Mr. Burton departed with a vigorous step that betokened him in good spirits for the coming campaign.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, Hilda ordered her jutka, and drove out with Ruth and Mary to accept the invitation of Devadasi to visit her on this first day of the Dipavali.

The streets were thronged with eager, excited people of all ages and castes, and Ramappa the driver had much ado to clear a way for Billy and the jutka. Finally, he had to descend from his perch in front of the cart, and lead the horse through the narrow passage he cleared by dint of much shouting and gesticulating, and cracking of a ferocious looking whip in dangerous proximity to bare backs and exposed dark limbs.

The slow progress of the cart gave the occupants an opportunity for conversation, and Hilda opened it by saying, "Ruthamma, who is Devadasi?"

"You have never seen her, Missyamma, although she lives in a house where we often visit. Do you remember a house at the corner of the Cloth Bazaar where a woman and her two daughters-in-law live?"

"Yes, it is a very clean little place, and we are always invited to sit in a little front apartment opening on to the road."

"Yes, yes, that is the place. How well Missyamma remembers. Well Devadasi lives there."

"Why have I never seen her before? Who is

she?" Hilda saw hesitation plainly stamped on Ruth's face, and so she turned enquiring eyes on Mary who in her turn admonished Ruth to tell the Missyamma all about Devadasi.

"Dear Missyamma," she began, "you must not be grieved or troubled. I did not like to tell you, because you are always so sorry for the women of our land. Devadasi is young and beautiful now. She is even happy in the life she leads. In her babyhood, she was dedicated by her parents to the infamous temple service that Missy knows is practiced in our land. She is called the wife of the demon who is supposed to live in that big tree at the crossroads near the railway station, and has lived all her life in the temple dedicated to his service; there she has learned to dance and to sing. Now she is an inmate of the house we are going to. When the Brahmin who has hired her, gets tired of her, or when her beauty and accomplishments no longer delight him, he will cast her adrift, when she will return to the temple, and if the priests think she is not likely to prove a source of good income to them, she will probably sink lower and lower in the life which is hers, because of the ignorance and superstition of her parents in vowing her to the temple service."

It was enough. Hilda asked no more questions during the rest of the drive, for Ruth had given her plenty upon which to meditate.

When they arrived at their destination, the

three women whom they usually saw were waiting for them in the little front chamber which had been newly cleaned, whitewashed, and decorated for the festival. Hilda admired the fresh cleanness of the room, greatly to the pleasure of the women, who told her every house in Ballapura had been similarly cleaned, and then they drew her attention to a large quadrangular marking in various coloured powders, in front of the house.

While they were looking at this, Hilda's attention was attracted by a jingle of anklets, and a heavy perfume stealing over the atmosphere. She turned around, to find herself confronted by a Hindu woman of seventeen or eighteen, whose natural loveliness of form and feature was enhanced by powder, and paint, jewels, flowers, and silken garments.

Devadasi had spent time, ability and money upon herself, so that she might create a great amount of admiration in the mind of the foreign lady whom she had heard much of from the other women of the house.

Her heavy golden-coloured silken sari, with its wondrously broad border of crimson and white woven in an ingenious Eastern pattern, was confined round her waist by a gold dhabu¹ from which scores of little golden bells were suspended. Her smooth round arms, her face and neck, had been polished with saffron until they

¹ Belt.

were the colour of yellow pines. The jewels that adorned every available part of her body were genuine gems of Indian workmanship. Flamingly gleamed in her hair and ears almost her ears, while surrounding the cluster of white gemstone flowers in her hair, was an ornament of gold that almost covered the top of her head like a cap.

In spite of the heavy jewellery on her ankles, her very movement was full of grace, and she walked across the floor with the gliding, floating motion peculiar to every dancing-fell in Southern India. The jingling of her ornaments, and the twinkling of her loose eyes, kept her in tune and exhilarated her steps.

How she rightly comprehended the value, and the true women who personally had started long in gloriously striped saris alone, in the presence of the assembly, as though fully aware of her superior stature and accomplishments. Everything about her surprised. While he wanted to make salutes, and to follow up her greeting with a few complimentary questions and remarks. Instead, conscious of her position, and of the following guests, and even her by all the women, was full of the government she had been taught from her childhood to assume, and asked if Hilda would like to visit certain rooms in the house, and see the library, how they were collecting the library.

Directed about the part of guide to perfection,

and was proud to shew off her superior knowledge, not only before Hilda, but also before the Bible women, and the Hindu women of the household in which she herself reigned for the time being as chief favourite.

In one room an astonishing collection was arranged upon and around a European table. This Devadasi explained represented the treasure of the family, and was to be worshipped morning and night during the festival period, under the name of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. For those five days all the goods and chattels of the house had become Lakshmi, and they were to be revered accordingly.

There were books, a slate, a pencil, a child's train, a looking-glass, a doll, cooking vessels, brass cups, together with odds and ends of every conceivable nature and use, gathered together as objects of pooja for the ignorant people, until Hilda imagined the superstitious belief of the worshippers could go no further. Next she was shown the lamp that had been made and dedicated to Yama, the god of death, and of the infernal regions. Then piles of fireworks, crackers, and coloured lights that were to be brought into requisition on the second day of the festival when Vishnu's triumphal entry into the city of Naraka the demon, would be celebrated.

"To-morrow," said Devadasi, "you will see Ballapura illuminated from one end to another, while thousands of tiny lamps will be hung,

wherever there is a space for them, to commemorate the march of the women before Vishnu, with lighted lamps, when he returned from slaying the demon.

"All Hindus will rise early in the morning," she continued, "fill their houses with lights, rub their bodies with sweet smelling ointments, and bathe themselves in hot water. The women, children, and men, will all perform the bathing ceremony and will then dress themselves in new clothes. After this, the chief female in the house will take some silver and brass dishes, and place wicks in them. This means that she hopes the coming year will be a happy one, and will witness the removal of all difficulties. Then every male in the household will make her a present of money; sweetmeats will be distributed, and friends will be invited to dinner."

"The festival lasts five days, does it not?" asked Hilda as Devadasi paused in her narration.

"Yes, there will be fireworks every night, and the male members of the community will pass much of their time in playing games for money or jewels. On the last day of the moon, which will be the fifth of the festival, all the merchants close their accounts for the year. New journals and account books will be bought and worshipped through the aid of a Brahmin priest. Lakshmi will be invoked to render the year prosperous throughout its days, and the priests and servants will all receive presents of money according to

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their rank, and after that the Dipavali will be at an end."

Hilda thanked Devadasi for all she had shown her, and the explanations she had given with regard to the feast of lamps, and begged that she might be allowed to show her some kindness in return.

Devadasi looked well pleased that her efforts had been appreciated, and conducted her visitors back again to the small apartment at the entrance of the house. At a signal from her, two female servants approached, each bearing a large brass tray. On one were three beautiful wreaths, and the other was simply loaded with fruit and sweetmeats. With consummate grace, Devadasi flung one of the long heavy wreaths over Hilda's head and then presented her with a lovely bouquet surmounted by a tinsel bird. The Bible women were similarly decorated and the servant was directed to carry to the waiting jutka the remaining flowers and the tray of fruit. Again Hilda thanked her hostess for the lavish display she had made, and the hearty welcome that had been accorded her, and departed under a plentiful shower of rose water sprinkled upon her from a curiously shaped silver goblet.

XXIII

LAKSHMI'S FAVOUR

FOR once it really did seem as though the capricious Lakshmi had been propitiated by the many festivities indulged in by the devotees who were bent upon winning her favouring smile upon their plans for despoiling Abdallah, the grain merchant, of some of his accumulated grain. If Osman the Mussulman had lived a few days longer, he would probably have revealed to Abdallah what he had overheard the conspirators planning in the temple of Basavana at Lingapura. But he was dead, and his interference in other people's concerns was at an end. Abu Taleb his master had also crossed the dividing line, and the owner of the grain store had mysteriously disappeared from Ballapura. He had left no instructions behind him, and when his clerks and servants saw that he was not a daily visitor to the stores, and that they were so entirely free from the surveillance of his keen eye, they neglected his interests, and sold only for their own profit.

The night watchman over the piles of shining rice, also became lax, and neglected the orders of the manager who usually took charge when his

master was absent. He was only an ignorant, superstitious, degraded, heathen man, but he was acute enough to see how his superiors in office were neglecting their work, neither was he too stupid to follow their example.

The last night of the Dipavali festival found him shaky in the legs, and confused in the head with the plentiful supply of toddy that had fallen to his lot through the liberality of the loungers of various bazaars, and when the darkest night of the dark half of October descended upon Ballapura, he was quite prepared to leave the grain store to the revels of the night demons while he wandered through the streets viewing the illuminations and enjoying the sportive qualities displayed by thousands of fizzling, sputtering crackers.

Hundreds, nay thousands of starving men, with no hope of a bountiful supply of food in the near future, had crowded into Ballapura every day of the festival and had returned to their village homes at night scarcely restrained from looting every one of the grain bazaars that were opened so temptingly before their hungry eyes. Burning lamps, fireworks, and crackers had no power to ease the pain of starvation, and as day succeeded day their physical sufferings goaded them on almost to desperation. That they were not bent on pleasure alone, became so apparent to Mr. Burton as the days passed by, that he kept a very sharp lookout to try and find if pos-

sible a clue to what was in the minds of the men who hung about so sullenly from morning to night. The street preaching had attracted thousands of men, women, and children, but they seemed to regard it as part of the tamasha,¹ more than anything else.

"If your God loves us, as you say He does, why doesn't He send the rain?" "If we do pooja to your God, will He give us food?" "O preacher, tell us how to get food for our starving bodies, and we will listen to your words of an unseen God." "We are hungry, hungry. We and our children are dying, because the rain clouds are far distant, and the earth is too parched for the grain to grow." These were the questions and exclamations that interrupted the catechists and the missionary, till as Mr. Burton looked over the sea of dark faces by which he was surrounded, and noted the unmistakable signs of slow starvation wrecking strong men, and sapping at the life of women and little children, he was fain to cry out in very anguish of soul at his own inability to supply the physical needs of the crowds around him. His own words, telling of Him who was the Saviour of mankind sounded for once like a hollow mockery, and with sorrow of heart he ceased preaching, and longed for the power to set before the famine stricken people just one good meal.

The leaven of conspiracy had worked well for

¹ Merry-making.

a month or more, and on that last dark night, all was in readiness for the silent and stealthy attack on Abdallah's grain store.

The idea was for a few men to break open the store, enter and help themselves to as much as they could carry away, pass out, and make room for the others so that all might have the chance of obtaining at least a few meals of the precious grain. All was to be done quietly so as not to attract the attention of the inhabitants of Ballapura, for village men alone had planned and developed the plot for despoiling the rich man of his ill-gotten gains.

The lamps were lit at last, the illuminations shone forth in their last brilliant effort, the crackers began to fizz in every possible and impossible corner of the town, and every few minutes a rocket of unusual splendour ascended causing a long, loud note of wondering exclamation; the tom-toms sounded their harsh voice abroad, and all the time silent, excited, famine stricken men were finding their way to the dark street where the Mohammedan's extensive stores were built.

The watchman was absent enjoying his drunken revels, and so there was no one to give the alarm. Some one beat the tom-toms louder and more discordantly than ever, thus drowning the sound of some quick sharp blows aimed at the door of Abdallah's front bazaar. A few more blows and an opening was made, admitting

two or three of the ring leaders; desperate hands set to work to widen the aperture, and soon the boards were being pulled down with lightning rapidity by the fingers of men nerved to strength through the pangs of hunger, and the hope of baskets of shining grain.

The throngs gathered in strength, becoming denser every minute. Those in the front were hemmed closer to the store by the ever increasing human tide pressing up at the back, and in order to find breathing room, they poured into the opening made in the store, like an army of locusts scaling a wall. In, in, they went, till the granary too became congested: but it was dark, and instead of laying hands on the much needed food, they stumbled and fell over each other. Another moment, and a tiny wick threw out an uncertain flickering light, but quite enough to reveal to the looters the heaps of grain they were in search of. The sight of the long expected food proved too much for their famished senses, and forgetting their promise of silence they set up a wolfish cry of delight as they fell upon it, and sought to gather it into the scanty cloths around their waists. The still increasing crowds in the narrow streets, not understanding the cry, took it up, until it echoed, and reechoed like the sound of souls in deadly peril.

The silence was broken, order was gone, and the hungry impatient men were turned into a pack of wild animals clamouring for the food so

long denied them. They fought and struggled, and struggled and screamed to get inside the stores. Those already within caught the contagion of excitement, and lost all control over themselves or their actions. Sacks of grain were thrown recklessly out, and coming into collision with heads and bodies, burst asunder, scattering rice, cholum, ragi, maize, chillies, and a host of other food stuffs in all directions. Then ensued a mad struggle to obtain the precious life preservers.

Friend fought with friend in the desperation of desire, with the result that the food was trampled on, and destroyed instead of being safely gathered, and tied into bundles.

Ever and anon, a rocket brighter than usual ascended, and cast a lurid light over the surging infuriated masses of humanity in that dark street. The noise of the tumult grew louder and louder until it attracted the attention of the merry-makers in the illuminated part of the town, and they paused in their amusements to listen whence the sound proceeded. Looks of consternation passed from one to another, and whispered words of devils, and demons, giants, and angry gods striving for the mastery, made the stoutest heathen heart quail.

Some one began to run, a few more followed hard after him; the racers increased, until it seemed as though all Ballapura was setting out in the one direction. Surely the narrow streets

leading to Abdallah's store would hold no more ; but on they pressed, not knowing why or wherefore.

The weak soon gave way to the strong, fell down and were trampled under hundreds of bare feet. There was no hope of any one rising, if they once fell beneath the onrush of the excited thousands, many of whom were intoxicated with toddy and arrack, and many others were suffering a frenzy of excitement through the effects of five days' loss and gain in their gambling games. The pleasure seekers mingled freely with the looters, and no one appeared to seek to stop the spirit of destruction that was upon them. Soon other stores as well as Abdallah's were attacked, the spoilers carrying off what they could, and wantonly destroying everything they laid hands on until wholesale looting was the order of the night, and destruction spread even to the illuminated parts of the town.

The tiny lamps lit in honour of Lakshmi, the goddess, were torn down, the long sheets of plate-glass in the bazaars of the Mohammedans were smashed into minute fragments, and still the excitement went on. By and by, a blaze of light shot into the sky, and the affrighted rioters stood aghast to see the flames spreading from shop to shop as though in mad desire to complete the work of destruction they had begun. The looters, the rioters, the pleasure seekers were checked ; for from mouth to mouth the news

flashed that Agni, the god of fire, was walking in their midst, and was taking his vengeance upon them.

The flames mounted higher and higher, and cast quite a brilliant reflection as far as the mission house where Hilda Roi was in her favourite resting-place on the roof. She watched the light growing more distinct, and as she watched she fancied the noise of a tumult was in her ears, and then she descended rapidly to ask some one what it could mean.

But the whole place was deserted. Every servant had gone off to see the last of the Dipavali celebrations, and Hilda was alone except for the schoolgirls in the next compound.

She crossed to the school, and found that the confused roar of human voices in the distance had aroused the children, and they were all awake, and watching the light that now glowed over Ballapura like the reflection from some huge furnace.

As they watched and listened, there came the quick, precise run of men under orders, and past the mission house the English troops from the cantonment were hurrying to the scene of the disturbance.

The noise of the thousands of rioters in the streets, followed by the glare in the sky, had warned the commanding officer that all was not well in the native city, and he had promptly ordered part of the regiment to proceed to the

town ; but they arrived too late to stop the ravages of the fire or the destruction of the bazaars. The sight of the soldiers acted like magic upon the infuriated throngs that melted away in all directions leaving the wounded, the dying and the dead in the streets ; the wreckage and the plunder dropped in their hurried flight revealed by morning's light the awful extent of the night's Saturnalia.

Fortunately there was no breeze to fan the flames, and so the fire forbore to leap the space to the vegetable market. And by dawn of day smoldering heaps alone remained of the prosperous Abdallah's property, for strange to say, the whole block that the fire consumed belonged to the man who had held back his grain from his starving townspeople, until the price should rise high enough even to satisfy his unholy love of gain. Early next morning, the soldiers were at work carrying off the dead for burial, and the wounded to the plague camp vacated that very day by its only occupant, Fatimah, who had escaped contagion in spite of the night she had spent by Abu's side.

Mr. Burton and his ready band of helpers, the catechists, were most active in their endeavours to bring help to the sufferers whose condition had not been improved by hours of exposure in the open streets.

Many bodies were charred and disfigured by the fire, many others had been reduced to a

fleshy pulp in the mad stampede towards Abdallah's store. In one street, Mr. Burton found the form of a little girl lying, her black curly head rested upon the bosom of an old Modammedan woman who was quite dead. Her heavy outer covering had fallen back revealing a face deeply marked with smallpox, and otherwise plain almost to ugliness. The missionary drew the veil tenderly over the dead face, and turned his attention to the still living child. She was lithe of form, and small in body, so he picked her up in his strong arms, and carried her carefully towards an improvised stretcher on which the mangled body of a little baby lay.

As he reached it, a military doctor came along, and stopped to speak to Mr. Burton, but the words were arrested on his lips as he glanced at the burden he carried, and exclaimed,

"Surely this must be my little friend whom I rescued from the plague house in the Moham-medan quarter, a week ago. It is not one native child in a hundred that can boast the ripples in the hair she has. Ah; poor little wounded mite. Take her to Miss Roi, Mr. Burton, and I will call and attend to her as soon as possible."

XXIV

WHAT SUNDARI KNEW

THE celebration of the Dipavali festival in Ballapura had ended disastrously. If Lakshmi's smile had been alluring the first four days, she certainly withdrew her favour on the night of the fifth. The hunger that had impelled the villagers to attack Abdallah's store remained unsatisfied. Some few of the ring-leaders had been arrested, tried and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment for the part they had taken in the riot. Many houses had been wrecked or burnt down, and scores of lives had been sacrificed. In consequence the poverty and distress of the people increased as the rain held off, and the hot weather came on.

The days and weeks that succeeded the tumult were busy ones in the mission house. Hilda Roi had gladly received Sundari into the Girls' Home, and with the aid of the matron and the skill of the doctor had nursed her back to health and strength, and a great measure of happiness.

But it was weeks before she was well enough to be questioned about the last fatal night of the Feast of Lamps. While she lay weak and ill, Hilda had been out to Lingapura to com-

municate with her parents, but had learnt that her mother was dead, and her father had gone on a journey. One afternoon she resolved to try and get the child to talk about the few days immediately preceding the night of her accident, and so she sat down by her bed, and began to peel an orange and give it to Sundari in quarters. As she peeled the fruit and divided it into pieces, she said,

“ My little Sundari, where do you think I went this morning soon after sunrise ? ”

“ Perhaps to Lingapura to find my mother and father. I wonder why they do not come here to see me.”

“ No, you have guessed wrongly. I have been to try and see your Rokaia, and the women of Abu Taleb’s household.”

“ O Missyamma, Rokaia is dead. I thought you knew all about it, and that was why you never spoke of her because you thought it would trouble me,” and Sundari’s beautiful eyes glittered with tears she could not shed.

“ Dead ! O my little sister. I did not know. When did she die ? ”

“ Listen, O Missyamma, and I will tell you all about it. After you went away that night, my Rokaia was very happy, and talked much of when you would come again. Every day, when she woke, she would say, ‘ the lady will come to-day, and tell me more about Jesus who is my friend,’ and when the day passed, and you did

not return, she would expect you the next day, and five days went by, and still you did not come."

"Ah Sundari, my little sister, those were the days of the festival, and Abu's younger brother who was in the office when I called the next day to obtain permission to visit Rokaia regularly, said his brother was absent in Bombay, and he could not allow me to visit the harem without his sanction. He bade me call again after the festival, when he thought his brother would probably be back."

"Oh yes, but all the time Rokaia's husband was dead, and so was Osman, the Mussulman who carried me away from Lingapura."

"My dear child, how do you know all this?" asked Hilda in astonishment.

"I will tell you. The last day of the festival, we were all so glad to see old Fatimah come in again. She had much news to tell us of all that had happened since the day she had set out to find you. She told us Abu Taleb had died in her own house of a dreadful disease called plague. She did not know what had come of his body, because some policemen took it away in a cart, and she said she was afraid that her own master must be dead too.

"When the wives and the slave girls heard that Abu was dead, they made so much noise with their cries and shrieks that the master's younger brother came to see what was the

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matter, and then Fatimah had to tell him all about the dreadful night Abu was in Osman's house; but the brother pretended not to believe her, and he said he had heard all about the Mohammedan gentleman who had died of plague, and that it was not Abu but some strange merchant from Bombay.

"Then the women of the harem grew quiet again, and Fatimah was able to tell us how the cruel English people burnt up everything that was in her house, and then took her away, and kept her living for ten days in a little tent, all by herself. On the last day of the festival, they told her she could go home because she had not died of plague as they expected she would. The doctor Dhorai was kind to her, and gave her five rupees to buy some new cooking chatties, but everything in her house was destroyed, and she had nowhere to go to, so she came to see Rokaia and the women, and Rokaia bade her stay there until the next day when the festival would be over.

"When night drew on, the women got very frightened, thinking that perhaps Fatimah had told the truth, and that their master was really dead. So we lit all the lamps we had, and took them into Rokaia's apartment, and we all sat together while Fatimah told us again of Abu's death till we all believed what she said, and we were too frightened to move. After a little while, Rokaia said, 'Let us talk about Jesus who loves us, and let us think of when the lady will

come back again to tell us more about Him,' and so we tried to remember all you had said.

"While we were talking Rokaia sat up on her lounge and presently her eyes began to sparkle, and she said, 'I feel so well and rested to-night. It must be true that Jesus gives rest to the weary ones. Sundari, Sundari: Jesus, my Jesus,' and then she fell back on the pillows with a strange look on her face. I put my arms round her, but she was heavy and cold." Sundari paused, and the tears fell in shining drops upon her cheeks. Hilda gave her another piece of the juicy orange, and gently begged her to tell the rest of the story another time.

"Dear Missyamma, let me finish. It does not seem so bad when I am talking to you," and she lay with the orange in her little brown fingers as she continued, "The women began to scream, and make a terrible noise, but while they made so much confusion within, there was the roar of many voices outside, and all the time my Rokaia lay quite still, and Fatimah took my arms from under her, and said she was dead.

"But the room was very light, for all the lamps were burning, and she looked more beautiful than I had ever seen her because the old tired expression had quite gone. Fatimah folded the pretty silk sari around her, and took me away. I don't think the other women noticed us go, because they were crying and screaming, and calling on the name of their holy prophet.

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“When we were in an outer apartment, Fatimah whispered now that Abu Taleb and Rokaia were both dead, she would take me away, and we would go back to Lingapura, and live once more in the house near Basavana’s temple. I felt sorry to leave Rokaia, but glad to think I should see my father and mother again.

“Fatimah wrapped me round in a thick sari, and we went out into the streets where thousands of pretty lamps were burning, and crowds of people were all running in one direction. Fatimah did not know where they were going, but she said there must be some tamasha to be seen, and we might as well go too. Then we got in amongst a lot of people, and there were so many coming behind us that we could not turn back, and yet we could not move forward. Fatimah put her arms round me to keep me from falling, but the crowds pushed us close up to a house pial, and she was knocked down, and I fell on top of her, and could not get up again. After that, Missyamma, I must have gone to sleep, for one morning I woke up in this nice bed, and I thought that I must be in Kailasa,” and a wan smile crossed the child’s tired little face as she brought her story to a close. Hilda forbore to comment on what she had heard, but instead said, “Now you must lie quite still, and eat your orange while I talk, and tell you all I have heard to-day. While you have been ill, I have tried several times to gain admittance to Abu Taleb’s

harem, but have always been refused my request. To-day I went past the money-lender's bazaar, and found it all closed up. On making enquiries, I was told that the business had been transferred to Madras, where Abu's brothers live, and that all the women of the harem had been taken there too. There was a man sitting near the bazaar, and as I knew him well by sight, I asked him if he knew the reason for the change, and he said, it was supposed that Abu Taleb, the great sowcar, had died of plague while visiting Bombay ; for neither he nor his servant Osman had ever returned to Ballapura. It was also thought that his senior partner Abdallah, the grain merchant, must have perished in the grain riots on the last sad night of the Dipavali ; for it was round his granary the tumult had raged most fiercely. As both partners appeared to be dead, Abu Taleb's younger brothers had decided to close up the Ballapura branch of the business."

"Did Fatimah go with the other women to Madras?"

Hilda hesitated for one moment as to whether she should tell Sundari all the sad news ; but decided it was better to let her know at once all that was to be told.

"No, little one. Kind old Fatimah must have been the Mohammedan woman who was found with her arms thrown protectingly around you."

"Was she hurt like I was?"

"No, she was not even bruised. She must

have died almost as gently as the beautiful Rokaia, and she was buried according to the Moslem rites by some of the charitably disposed people of her own faith."

"Rokaia knew Jesus, but Fatimah only heard the little I could tell her," was Sundari's quiet reply while a sad expression crept into her eyes that looked unnaturally large and bright now that her face was thinner.

"I think we have talked long enough, my Sundari. I will sing to you. What shall it be?"

"Please sing:

" 'Rescue the perishing,
Care for the dying.'"

Old blind Sankamma sang that to me yesterday, and I would like to hear it again."

CHAPTER XXV

RUTHAMMA'S STORY

“**M**ISS ROI, could you spare three or four days to take a trip into the district next week?” were the words with which Mr. Burton greeted Hilda one morning a few months after her long talk with Sundari.

“The only way that I could spare the time would be by leaving my work here,” was her reply.

“Well, suppose you decide to do that. There are not many Christians out at Little Ballapura, but they are struggling to keep open a school, and I think if you could look in, and then visit some of the houses with our Bible women stationed out there, it would be most helpful. I am going out on Friday to baptize some people, but I shall leave again on Tuesday, and if you leave Ballapura the same day, and arrive on Wednesday it will give our catechist time to clean up the chapel after my occupation of it, and I can arrange for bullock carts to meet you at the railway station. What do you think of the plan?”

“Yes, I think I could manage it. Can I re-

turn to Ballapura in time for our Sunday services?"

"Oh yes. I must be back for Sunday too, but I want to visit several places besides Little Ballapura. You ought to be back easily by Saturday afternoon, but it will probably be midnight before I arrive."

Six o'clock on the following Wednesday found Hilda with her faithful companion Ruth at the Ballapura railway station, ready to commence the first stage of their night journey to Little Ballapura.

The train was packed from end to end with a seething mass of Hindu humanity. In vain Hilda and Ruth tried to obtain a seat in a second-class compartment, and at last they had to appeal to the station-master, but he was just as unsuccessful in his search as they were. He vouchsafed the information that owing to the crowd of passengers travelling that night, an extra carriage would have to be attached to the train, and Hilda might have a seat in a third-class compartment.

While he spoke, the carriage was shunted along, and the station master called a coolie to sweep out a compartment for the English Dhorasani. But while he swept with hearty good-will, the travelling public pushed forward, and took possession of the carriage in overwhelming numbers, and Hilda again had to seek the aid of the station-master. But he was pow-

erless to eject the occupants. One man against thirty or forty determined seat holders was quite unequal to the task before him. The expression of his face told plainly that he wished the English lady would find a seat for herself and not trouble him over the matter. As he stood with a perplexed countenance, a Parsee gentleman emerged from a first-class carriage, and the station-master explained his dilemma to him, and asked if he would allow the English lady and her servant a seat in his carriage. Hilda hastened to add that she was going only a short distance, so that she would not be any inconvenience to him if he were travelling the whole night.

"Madam," was his reply, "I am proceeding to my home in Bombay, but if you are leaving the train before eleven o'clock to-night, I shall with much pleasure place my compartment at your disposal until then."

"I believe we arrive at our destination at about half-past nine. As you so kindly give up your carriage to us, I shall most thankfully avail myself of your generosity in this matter as the business that calls me into the country is important, and my work will suffer if I am delayed at the commencement of my journey."

"If the arrangement suits madam, and brings even the smallest happiness to her, I am pleased to forego, for a few hours, such a small luxury as a carriage to myself," was the bland reply of the Parsee merchant.

And so instead of being left standing on the platform, Hilda and Ruth were whirled along on the first stage of their journey in a luxuriously cushioned first-class carriage. But the enjoyment of the comfort was slightly marred for Hilda because the Parsee would stand outside on the platform rather than intrude his presence upon her. She would have enjoyed a conversation with this hospitable sun-worshipper, but he gave her no opportunity, and she had to content herself with a few warm words of thanks when she vacated the carriage of which she had deprived him.

True to his promise, Mr. Burton had sent three bullock carts to meet the travellers, and soon the little wayside station was left in the moonlight, and the bullocks were going along at their own delightful pace. Neither deep ruts nor boulders proved a source of trouble to either the drivers or the bullocks. On they went, jolting Hilda, and the mattress, on which she lay, almost out of the cart. It was vain to call to the bandy man, for the motion of the cart was as soothing to him as a mother's foot on the rocker of her baby's cradle, and before many miles were accomplished he was asleep at his post, and the patient bullocks were plodding on over the rough road without any guiding human hand.

After about two hours' travelling the way became more even, and by the coolness of the air Hilda knew she must be crossing the range of

hills behind which Little Ballapura lay. Then the increased motion told her she must be descending, and she vaguely wondered if she would reach the plain whole or in pieces. Her hair-pins had long before taken refuge in the straw at the bottom of the cart, and her hair hung down her back in wild disorder, but she dare not take her hands from their convulsive hold on the bamboo rods that formed the sides of the cart, lest she should be pitched forward, on the backs of the descending bullocks.

It was a relief when the foot of the hills was reached, and the road stretched ahead on a fairly level plain. Hilda breathed rather more freely, and even tried to lift up the sack at the end of the cart to see how her companions in travel were faring, but the other carts were nowhere in sight, and she ventured to touch the driver on his back with her umbrella to wake him up, and ask if the other carts were ahead, but she only received a sleepy grunt in reply. By and by, she too got accustomed to the uneven motion, became drowsy, and finally dropped asleep, and woke to find it three o'clock in the morning, and the cart standing still outside the chapel at Little Ballapura, while the cheery tones of the catechist were bidding her welcome in the name of the little Christian community she had come to visit for the first time. The allotted three days flew by all too quickly, for there was much to be done, both in the school, and in connection with the

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house to house visitation carried on by the wife of Dasappa the catechist.

The last night had come, and Hilda was alone in the little mission chapel where all was quiet and peaceful at the close of a busy day. The supper was over, and the cot which had been set up in a corner of the chapel looked very inviting, especially so in face of the fact that she hoped to be astir in the morning long before the sun rose so that she might be well on her way to Ballapura before the intense heat of midday drove her and her companions to take shelter in a friendly wayside bungalow where they expected to find breakfast awaiting them.

As Hilda sat wrapped in thought, Ruth glided into the chapel, and startled Hilda by saying: "Are you very tired, Missyamma? The moon is shining brightly; it is so cool after the heat of the day, and I would like you to come with me to my brother's house. My brother's wife is not a Christian, do please come and see her. There will be no opportunity to-morrow morning because we leave so early."

Who could resist the pleading tones and the soft beseeching eyes of the dark figure asking so earnestly, "Are you very tired, Missyamma?"

Certainly Hilda could not, and she answered promptly, "Not too tired for a walk with you, Ruth." Putting on a light wrap, the two women passed out into the moonlight which was shedding a soft radiance all round, lighting up the

narrow dirty streets, resting on the gopuras of the idol temples, and playing round the little chapel which for those who had just emerged from it, possessed so many sacred memories. After walking quite a short distance Ruth said, " Please wait here one minute, Missy," and before Hilda had time to reply, she darted from her side, and she was left standing in the deserted street of a heathen town, not knowing just where she was, or what was about to happen.

However she had not to wait many minutes, for Ruth, her friend, and fellow-worker soon returned, and with a happy face said, " It is all right, come along, Missy. My sister-in-law will talk to you. She is quite alone."

They walked quickly on, and passed from the region of brilliant tropical moonlight into a dark courtyard, and from thence into a large room lit up by a small wick flaring away in a little grease at the top of a native lamp. After getting used to the darkness, Hilda saw the object of her visit sitting on a mat on the floor. A heathen woman, proud of her caste, proud of her devotion to the gods of her fathers, scornful of the religion of others, and without the shadow of a desire for anything different from what her ancestors had possessed. After a good deal of time had been wasted in the customary greetings, and many curious enquiries had been answered, Hilda managed to come to the main object of her visit, and amid many interruptions

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to tell Ruth's heathen relative of Jesus, mighty to save, and mighty to keep all who came unto Him in faith. She had heard the story of Christ's love many times from Dasappa's wife, but listened to it with renewed interest as Hilda Roi spoke, yet apparently it had no effect upon her, for rather than talk about this new religion, she was eager to tell all the gossip of the bazaar, and the family history of the past six years since her young relative had embraced Christianity and had left mother, friends, and home to follow Jesus.

Ruth would have liked to linger, but the night was wearing on, and Hilda suggested they had better return to the shelter of the chapel. In silence Ruth complied and once again the two were out in the moonlight streets. Suddenly Ruth broke the silence by asking in suppressed excitement if her companion would like to see the house where she was born.

"Is it far away, dear Ruthamma, because the hour is late?"

"No, no, Missyamma: it is quite near," and the girl pointed to a much larger house than any of the others in the street they were walking down.

Hilda took a few steps forward, so that she might get a better view of the place that was enshrined in her Bible woman's memory as home, and Ruth spoke again.

"My mother lives there now. How I would

like to see her to-night, and hear her speak kindly to me as she did before I became a Christian. Since the day I gave up idol worship, she has not shown me any love, or spoken one kind word to me, and I do so long for my mother's love. If she would only love Jesus she would love me too." As she finished speaking a cry rang out on the still night air, "Brother, brother."

For a moment Hilda was startled, until she realized where she was, and what had happened. She was standing in a heathen land, outside the heathen home of a Christian girl who was an outcast from the home and hearts of her relations, and who dared not to cross the threshold or look on the faces of those she loved because she had heard the voice of Jesus, and hearing that voice had obeyed, and left all to follow in His steps.

After the cry had been twice repeated, a man appeared on the pial of the house. He was a fair specimen of a well satisfied heathen man, with his loin cloth thrown carelessly on, and his sacred thread showing conspicuously white against his dark skin. He was the brother who had come out at the sound of that cry in the street.

At first he was inclined to be rude, but the sight of the strange English woman with his sister kept him somewhat in check, for after a few questions had been asked, he became more communicative, but at the same time steadily refused

to allow Ruth to enter the house or to see any other members of the family.

After much pleading Ruth asked in quivering accents, "If I may not come in, will my mother come out to speak to me? I do want to see her, and hear her voice once again."

"Yes, perhaps you do. But your mother does not want to see you; she is taking her rice now, and cannot be disturbed."

But Ruth was persistent, and made yet another effort, and this time the father's heart within the man responded; for the chord touched by his sister was the chord of love.

She asked no more about her mother, but Hilda detected the sound of tears in her voice, as she said,

"Since I went away, brother, you have had two little babies born to you. I have never seen them. Are they nice little babies? What are their names? Do let me see them just once. O my brother, only once," and she clasped her hands entreatingly.

The father's voice was certainly less gruff as he said, "They are now asleep, so you cannot see them to-night and to-morrow you will be gone."

Hilda detected the wavering indecision of his tone, and at once promised entire silence for both if they might take but one short peep at the sleeping children, and in a few minutes, they had crossed the forbidden boundary, and that young Christian aunt was gazing with eyes of love upon

her two small heathen relatives and one of them was actually laid in her arms that she might kiss and fondle it for a few minutes.

Soft and low though the voices of the speakers were, as they admired the two plump Hindu babies, the sound must have penetrated further than they were aware of, for quite suddenly a loud and angry feminine voice demanded what was going on, and turning round Ruth found herself face to face with her mother whom she so longed to see, and be reconciled to.

When the mother saw her daughter such a storm of abuse was poured out as made Hilda quiver all over. With curses, bitter and deep she drove Ruth out of the room.

"O mother, mother, speak kindly to your child," was the despairing cry of poor Ruth as Hilda drew her gently away from the sound of the angry words that were entering like iron into her loving heart. As the friends walked back to the chapel they talked of Him who sticketh closer than a brother, becoming more precious to those who love and trust Him fully than even father or mother or any other earthly relation can ever be.

XXVI

TO RAMASWAMI'S BUNGALOW

THE Shepherd Village, where Lingappa had found a refuge, was far removed from the world of Ballapura, and no disturbing influence reached the simple minded folk there, except that, they too began to feel the pinch of the impending famine, and consequently the shepherds had to wander further afield to find pasturage for their diminishing flocks.

About half a dozen of the shepherds together with Lingappa were strongly drawn towards Christianity, and their theme of conversation was nearly always connected with the return of Mr. Burton, and the settlement of a Christian teacher in their midst; but the weeks and the months flew by with no message from the great outer world, and it required all Lingappa's small stock of persuasive powers to keep the spark of hope burning within the hearts of the men who were his daily companions.

The cool weather of December and January had glided almost imperceptibly into the hot days of February, and the scorching hours of March. It was quite hopeless to look for rain until June, and then there would probably be only a few days with passing showers.

The small stock of grain stored in the village was getting less and less; the wells, of which there were several deep ones, were running dry, the sheep were dying for want of grass, and the men began to grow sullen and dispirited.

The carpenter, whose work Lingappa had been invited to do, died, leaving no son to succeed him, and the village authorities pressed him to remain for the time being. Lingappa loved his handicraft, and indeed was quite clever at the elaborate carving that all Indian village carpenters have to learn, and so he willingly gave his services in return for his food, and a house to live in.

As he became accustomed to his work, and went in and out of the temples doing the slight repairs that were necessary, the poojaris began to notice that the new carpenter was lax in his devotion to the gods.

He never prostrated himself before the idols, or carried flowers or limes or cocoanuts as he had been wont to do in his old home, and when questioned concerning his delinquencies in this direction, he answered the poojaris that the English Dhorai had taught him to pray from his heart in the secret of his own home to a God who was a Great and Mighty Spirit, and who could read the secret thoughts of those who worshipped and loved Him. But this was quite contrary to the teaching of the village priests, and they set themselves to stop the spread of

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such heresy lest others should become tainted, and the revenue of their temples suffer in consequence.

Accordingly, the poojaris instigated the villagers to organize on a larger scale than usual a devil dance to seek to propitiate the demons who were supposed to be tormenting the shepherds by causing them to wander far and wide vainly leading their sheep from place to place in search of the food that was nowhere to be found. For weeks, the forthcoming devil dance was the topic of conversation amongst both old and young, and all looked forward to it with feelings of pleasure strangely mingled with deep dread.

Lingappa heard of all the elaborate preparations that were in train, and privately determined to keep out of the sound of the revelry, and so on the appointed day he had gone off early with the shepherds.

Night came on, and the festivities commenced, mildly at first, but gradually working up to the pitch of excitement dear to the native mind. Just when the madness was at its height, and many hundreds of the villagers had worked themselves up to a like frenzy with the hired professional dancers, and were throwing themselves with zest into the diabolical dancing, and whirling round the place of sacrifice, Lingappa, the strange carpenter from no one knew where, was being branded as the cause of the impending famine. Soon a whisper from one and then an-

other, was being passed round amongst the maddened throngs that the goddess Durga was calling out for human blood, and that no rain would fall until a bleeding body lay on the sacrificial stone. The blood of goats and sheep was not sufficient to turn away her wrath from the villagers who had received a devil possessed man in their midst, and she demanded the blood of the stranger to flow at her feet; his skull to add to those already around her neck, and his hands to enlarge the ghastly girdle around her waist.

The fiat had gone forth, Lingappa must die, a sacrificial victim on the altar of Durgamma the goddess of lust, and excited, nay infuriated men rushed in haste from the scene of the midnight orgy, to bring him a prisoner to the priest who should slay him in front of the hideous idol of the bloodthirsty wife of Shiva.

But Lingappa was not to be found either in the village or out of it, and while they searched in one direction he was tramping away in another with his face steadily set towards Lingapura.

When his shepherd friends had returned at night he had made an excuse for leaving them at a point some miles away from the sheepfolds and had walked on and on, until feeling tired he lay down under the shelter of some rocks with which that part of the country abounded, and had fallen asleep not to awake until the early dawn of the following morning.

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His first waking thought was of an imperative need that he should return to Lingapura without delay.

He rose refreshed with his long dreamless sleep, and even while the brilliancy of the morning stars paled before the advent of the sun, he began to walk with the determined gait of a man who had an important object in view.

At every step, his spirits rose, and the further he proceeded on his unplanned journey, the less regret he felt at leaving the shepherd village behind.

But a week's travelling, with only a chance meal now and again, wearied him, and he began to wonder if he were in the right direction, and how far he could be from Lingapura. The country was not familiar, and he half suspected that he was not returning the way he came.

The villages seemed long distances apart, and it was seldom he met any one to talk to. Every day the heat became more intense, and he found he could go but slowly after the sun was well up in the heavens.

On the morning of his eighth day of travelling the sun rose like a great fiery ball of molten copper, and called him to renewed exertion if he were to get any distance within the next three hours, but he felt so uncertain as to which way to take that he lingered beyond his usual starting time. When he did rise from his resting place by the wayside, he took up his turban

which had served as a covering during the night, and began leisurely twisting it into its natural use around his head. Meanwhile he scanned the horizon with anxious eyes. As he looked a dark speck loomed up on the long white road behind him, and as he watched, it took form, and in a few minutes he felt sure it was an approaching bullock cart. In half an hour, the cart was alongside him, and he was asking the driver which was the nearest way to Lingapura. The bandy man had never heard of Lingapura before, but he was inclined to be friendly, and so he offered the wayfarer a seat behind the bullocks for the next five miles.

Lingappa, thankful for the respite from walking with his already blistered feet along the hot road, gratefully accepted the questionable comfort of the front rail of the bandy.

Before the bullocks started off again, with their uneven jog trot, a voice from within the cart bade the driver to mend his pace if he meant to reach the bungalow in good time.

Thus admonished, the driver exerted all his powers to urge the bullocks forward. He twisted their tails, cracked his whip, spoke encouragingly to them, wound up their tails again, and finally with many expletives slapped them on the sides, with the result that the animals really did break into a brisk trot for quite a quarter of a mile; but soon the exertions of both driver and bullocks ceased, and their slow going Oriental nature re-

sumed its ascendancy. The rope that did duty for reins hung carelessly across the bullocks, and the driver sought consolation in a choice mouthful of much loved betel which he extracted from a fold in his loin cloth. He even passed a bit on to Lingappa, and then began to be communicative.

"I am only going as far as a traveller's bungalow on this side of the railway station, and there I shall have a good meal, and a rest before returning to Little Ballapura this evening."

"What are you going there for?" asked Lingappa, privately hoping he might come in for a share of the good meal.

"The man inside the cart is the cook of an English lady who has been visiting our town. He is going on to Ramaswami's bungalow to get the Dhorasani's food ready. He carries the rice, and the bread, the curry and the chutney, and the lady will come when the meal is prepared."

Lingappa became interested. This was news indeed. An English lady, and a morning meal, to say nothing of the prospective luxury of a traveller's bungalow close at hand, were the most interesting items of news he had heard since his midnight talks with the missionary in the little white tent.

"Where is the lady now?" was his next question.

"We left her in Little Ballapura last night; but my elder brother was to be ready with his

cart to bring her on an hour before daybreak this morning."

Again the voice of the servant within commanded the driver to cease talking, and to hurry his animals along. But Lingappa had plenty of food for reflection, and the way seemed all too short to the bungalow where he must alight, and make a parting salaam to the friendly bandy man.

It must have been eight o'clock when the shelter of the wayside rest-house was reached. The cook was in a hurry, and pressed both Lingappa and the driver into his service, to help unload the cart, so that he might start his preparations for the morning meal with as little delay as possible.

When he was no longer wanted, Lingappa loitered about in the hope that the English Dhorasani would arrive, so that he might get a glimpse of her and satisfy himself with regard to her identity with the white lady who had visited Lingapura, on the day of his wife's death, and little Sundari's disappearance.

Then too, he wanted something to eat, and he quite expected the driver of the cart and the cook would share their meal with him.

He became very interested in watching all the preparations for the forthcoming breakfast as Mhadri, the cook, informed him what the first meal of the day was called in English, and he hovered round the little dining-room in wonder-

ing surprise at the white cloth, knives and forks, cups and saucers that were produced from a basket, and laid on the table ready for use. The meal was cooked in good time, but the lady for whom it was prepared delayed her arrival, and all three of the men relaxed their efforts, and threw themselves on the ground to doze away the time of waiting.

Towards twelve o'clock, the rumble of cart wheels announced the approach of some one, and the cook caught up his white calico jacket, and ran out to the front of the bungalow as he fastened it up. Lingappa followed him rather more leisurely, and took up his position behind a tree so that he could be an unseen spectator of all that might happen. He was just in time to see a native girl slip out of the back of the cart, run into the bungalow and return with a chair which she placed for some one to step upon, and while the Dhorasani was making use of the chair as a means for descending to the ground, another cart came slowly into the courtyard and from it jumped the white haired missionary whom he had last seen many miles away in a little tent pitched on the outskirts of the Shepherd Village.

Lingappa could restrain himself no longer, and rushing from his hiding-place, he threw himself before Mr. Burton and sought to kiss his feet as he almost sobbed out, "My father! My father!"

There was glad surprise for all the party:

for Hilda immediately recognized the man who had been her guide from the village of Lingapura, on to the main road that led to Ballapura.

The next few minutes were taken up with mutual explanations, and the breakfast that had been prepared under such difficulties by the cook, was quite unheeded, until Mr. Burton had told Hilda all he knew of Lingappa, and she in return had to tell of her meeting with him, and of the services he had rendered her.

XXVII

SUNDARI'S FATHER

AFTER meeting with Miss Roi and Mr. Burton in the wayside bungalow, built to gain merit by some dead and gone Ramaswami, there was no more weary tramping, with blistered feet over hot and dusty roads for Lingappa. He shared the cook's curry and rice, helped to pack the luggage-bandy, and then rode as an inside passenger with the other servants as far as the country railway station where Hilda procured him a ticket, and for the first time in his life he stepped into a railway carriage, and was carried over the next thirty miles of his journey with what, to his simple mind, seemed like lightning rapidity.

The school children were all on the alert, expecting the arrival of Miss Roi, after her few days' absence in the country, and when the whistle of the train was heard in the distance, there was a general running to and fro, to see who would be the first to make salaam to the Missyamma.

Six months in the quiet healthy comfort of the mission home had improved Sundari wonderfully. She had grown perceptibly taller; her

hair too was long enough to gather into a small plait, and her simple white muslin sari with its narrow yellow border, suited her far better than the gorgeous apparel with which Fatimah had adorned her, or than the dirty torn apology she had worn in the old days at Lingapura.

Many of the girls had obtained the matron's permission to go to the front gate to see Miss Roi return, and a few of them including Sundari were standing on the veranda when the jutka drove up. They all wanted to speak, and be spoken to, and while Hilda was chatting away to them, the luggage bandies came slowly up. First the cook jumped out, and he was followed by a dirty, unkempt, almost unclothed stranger, at the sight of whom many of the girls retreated. Only Sundari and Nilamma remained, for Sundari had grasped Nilamma's hand at the first glimpse she caught of the man alighting from the bullock-cart, and stood transfixed with an intense look in her eyes as she waited breathlessly for him to turn round. It seemed an age to her, but in reality it was only a few seconds until she was sure her eyes had not deceived her, and then she broke away from Nilamma with a glad cry of recognition, "My father! O my father!"

The words gave Lingappa an odd choking sensation, for the voice was the voice of his own beloved Sundari for whom he had been searching for so many long months; but the owner of the voice was a tall, clean, white-robed maiden

whom surely he had never seen before now. The months that had worked such a change in Sundari seemed to have left her father quite untouched. He was the same father, but she was a transformed Sundari. But was he the same? In outward appearance, yes; but the grace of God had been at work in his heart, and the inward man had become so transformed, that he too, was a new creation in Christ Jesus his Lord, and as Sundari and her father met once again after their long months of separation with them both, old things had passed away forever, and all things had become new.

Lingappa remained in the mission compound for a fortnight, and while there learned much that pertains to the Christian life. He attended the services in the mission chapel, he learned to pray, and to worship the Living and True God in sincerity and in truth. He became the possessor of a New Testament in his own sweet language, and the knowledge of reading that he had obtained when attending the heathen pial school at Lingapura, now stood him in good stead, and he was able to read for himself the things relating to Christ and His Kingdom.

A fortnight of Christian companionship had worked wonders too, in his outward appearance. When he was washed and shaved, and arrayed in a clean loin cloth and a white jacket, he looked as much a new man outwardly, as he gave signs of the new birth inwardly.

It was Sunday morning, and he had been to the early morning service. At the close of it he had seen a whole family of villagers receive the rite of Christian baptism. He had heard the questions asked by Mr. Burton, and the unfaltering confession made by the three grown-up members of the family, of their renunciation of idolatry, and of their faith in Jesus Christ the well-beloved Son of God, and their Saviour. The whole service had made a great impression upon him, and had opened a new train of thought for him.

Paulappa, one of the catechists belonging to the mission, had heard Lingappa's story from Mr. Burton, and becoming interested in him, asked him to share his midday meal that Sunday, and this gave Lingappa an opportunity of asking many questions with regard to the ceremony he had witnessed in the church. Paulappa too, was glad to be able to instruct him further in regard to things belonging to the Christian life, and the meaning of the baptismal ceremony. When Lingappa fully understood that baptism was an outward sign by which those who received it testified their faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, he was anxious to start off at once, and beg Mr. Burton to call together the whole Christian Church in Ballapura, and before the assembled community bestow upon him the outward and visible sign of the inward grace that was at work in his life and heart. But Paulappa re-

strained him, and explained that it would be much better for him to wait at least a year, and so become quite settled in his principles before submitting to a rite that in proclaiming him a Christian would also brand him as an outcast from all his friends and relatives who were still members of the Hindu community.

Mr. Burton had just returned from the English service which he conducted in the cantonment chiefly for the benefit of the soldiers stationed in Ballapura, and was enjoying the stillness of the starlit night as he lay stretched full length in a rattan chair out in the compound when a warning cough, and a rustling amongst the Croton leaves proclaimed the fact that he was not alone, and in a few minutes Lingappa was sitting tailor fashion on a mat in front of him, and was beginning one of the delightful talks that his soul revelled in.

"Oh Dhorai! I have eaten your rice, and worn your clothes since the full moon of March, and now to lighten the darkness of the night, only the bright stars shine overhead."

"Yes, Lingappa, that is true, but hungry men must be fed."

"O my father, I am strong. I can work. Tomorrow, I will return to my own village, and do the work I have been accustomed to, since I was a little boy by my father's side."

"It is a very good thought, Lingappa," interpolated Mr. Burton, for he could see by the ex-

pression of the man's face, something more was working in his mind.

"To-morrow I will go, but before I go, I want to be known as a Christian. I want a new name, and a new sign in my life like the people received this morning. I left my village in the early morning, just as the darkness of night was fleeing before the first streaks of dawning light in the East. Darkness was in my soul, fear in my heart, and heavy chains of sin bound me a prisoner at the feet of thousands of evil spirits; but as the dawn chases away the darkness of night, and the sunlight dispels the grey mists of early morning flooding the whole land with brilliant sunshine, so Jesus, the Rest-giver, the Good Shepherd has dispelled the darkness of my soul, has chased away the fear that held me in its deadly grip, and has broken the chains of sin. Jesus first brought the dawn of a new hope into my life, and now the dawn has expanded into morning light. Jesus has come to me. The beams of His love are around me. He is my light. The darkness has passed."

Mr. Burton listened in amazement, and did not at once speak, for lack of words in which to reply to Lingappa's Oriental method of expression, and he, quick to note the pause, took up his theme again.

"To-morrow I will go back. I will tell my friends and neighbours of all I have learned. I will live for Jesus in Lingapura till the Dhorai

can send a teacher who will be like the full moon shining in all her brilliancy on a clear night. Till the moon arises I will be as the faintest, smallest star shining for Jesus in dark Lingapura."

Lingappa seemed so full of his purpose that his baptism was not again mentioned, and Mr. Burton did not refer to it himself, as he felt the man needed a testing time.

He was not anxious to have a long list of converts to total up year by year, but he did desire above all things to know of the steadfast life of those who professed to be followers of the Lord, and so he always arranged for a term of probation for the many who came forward and desired Christian baptism.

The next morning Mr. Burton, Hilda, Paulappa the catechist, Sundari, and her father met together in the missionary's study, and with one accord they bowed in prayer before the Loving Father, to commit Lingappa to His gracious keeping ere he set out to take up his mission in Lingapura. With true devotion, the natives prostrated themselves with their faces touching the ground, and one after another the prayers ascended on behalf of the one who was going forth alone to new and untried experiences.

It was eight miles to Lingapura, and so Mr. Burton arranged that Lingappa should travel half the distance by cart. When the prayer-meeting adjourned, the cart stood in front of the

bungalow with the bright morning sunlight penetrating every corner of it, and Lingappa with sunshine in his heart and on his face stepped in, and was driven off amid the hearty good wishes of the missionaries, and the little knot of natives who had gathered together to wish him Godspeed.

When the bullock cart was well out of sight, Mr. Burton opened a small packet that Lingappa had begged him to accept at parting, and within the folds of the paper he saw the dirty, well worn strands of a sacred thread, the most precious possession of a twice born caste man.

He showed it to Miss Roi, and said, "Lingappa is in earnest. By this sign he means to say he has completely severed himself from his heathen associations."

XXVIII

DAWN IN LINGAPURA

THE next two years passed rapidly by. The threatened famine dealt more lightly with the district of Ballapura than it did with the Northwest Provinces, and the third season the usual Monsoon brought rain in abundance. The brave little water holes, that had held out so gallantly during the failure of the rains, modestly retired before the inrush of the flooded rivers. The wells filled up, grain was being sold in the bazaars at normal prices, and the disasters that followed the eventful Dipavali festival when Lakshmi was credited with hiding her face from her devotees, were almost forgotten except by the few who had suffered most keenly at the time. Only a heap of blackened ruins remained to tell the tale of the wealthy Abdallah's grain store, for that gentleman had never returned to Ballapura, after his hasty flight on the day of Abu Taleb's death.

It was the fourth day in the month of the second December that had come and gone since the sunny day on which Lingappa had said good-bye to the interested group of friends gathered together in Mr. Burton's compound, and once more he contemplated setting out on a

short journey, but this time he did not consult the village priest. Nor did he look around for propitious omens. He did rise with the advent of the morning star, and start out almost before the first grey streaks of dawn preceded the rising sun. There was no vague wonder in his heart, and no stealthy glances into dark corners, or shrinking away from the shadows cast by the idol temples around him, for he knew whither he was bound; and there was gladness in his heart, and hope in his life.

The morning air was cool and invigorating, and Lingappa walked with a step of a man, strong in body and in soul, and so before the sun had gained much power, he was well on his way to Ballapura, to have an important interview with Miss Roi who expected to see him that day; for Mr. Burton had proved a successful advance agent on behalf of Lingappa and had whispered a secret concerning him to the lady missionary.

It was pay day for the mission agents, and at 9 A. M., many of them were already assembled on the veranda of the mission house, to receive the money due to them for their month's work, and to pour out to Miss Roi the encouraging and the discouraging features connected with schools and pupils, open air work, house to house visitation, and the other branches of missionary effort in which they were one and all engaged.

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When Lingappa reached the now familiar gate leading to the mission compound, there was already a goodly number of natives gathered there. They hailed his arrival with apparent pleasure, and soon he was seated amongst them, chewing his favourite betel while he listened to the talk around him and occasionally added his quota to the general conversation that was going on.

Once he raised his turban and accidentally revealed the fact that his hair was cut in European style. Nor were those around him slow to note the change. At once a volley of questions assailed him, and the sound of the excited voices on the veranda penetrated to Hilda in her study where she was receiving the workers one by one. Lingappa smiled comfortably, with just a touch around his mouth of that humour which brought out strongly the resemblance between himself and Sundari. Then he coughed comfortably too, for somehow he felt he had scored a point above some of his native companions who still clung to the tuft of long hair hanging from the crown of their heads. The cough cleared his throat sufficiently for him to begin to tell them why he had decided to part with his hair.

“ My friends, you all know how it has been with me in Lingapura, since I renounced my heathen practices, and turned to the Lord of Light and Love and more especially since last hot weather

when I was baptized, and my fellow caste men knew I was proud, yes and thankful too, to be openly known as a Christian. Up till the time of my baptism they tolerated all the new ideas I had received ; they let me do the village work, and were kind to me in many ways : they even listened to all I had to tell them of the New and Living Way, but after my baptism they turned against me, they persecuted me, they cursed me, and sought by all means in their power to drive me out of Lingapura."

"What has that to do with having your hair cut like the Dhorai's, O Lingappa?" asked some one impatient to hear an explanation of such an unusual proceeding.

"My friend, listen with patience. I am coming to that point in due course. The poojaris were especially bitter, and I know they turned into enemies those who were inclined to be my friends. The dhobi would not do my washing. The sweeper refused to come near the house. The people openly cursed me, and threw stones at me when I went to the well for my daily water ; for I had to go myself as no one would draw any for me. Then the barber would not shave me, and many a time I thought I should have to leave Lingapura, and seek employment amongst the Christians of Ballapura ; but I did want to be a little light in that dark place, and so I prayed earnestly day by day, and stayed on always hoping in God who never failed me in all

my trials. By His grace I overcame many of the difficulties, and now every day some of the men come to my pial, and listen to the reading of the Holy Word, and when the Missyamma and the Bible women come out each week, the women gather round her, and are glad to learn of Jesus. Chikka Basamma carries water for me every day, and often cooks my rice, and ——”

“Who cut your hair, O friend Lingappa?” interrupted a young catechist who had just returned from the training school in Bangalore.

“Oh, yes, my hair, I was forgetting it. Well it was like this. When the poojaris persuaded the barber I was possessed with an evil spirit which would enter him if he shaved me, I knew I must try and do it myself, so whenever I had the chance I used to loiter round the tree where he carried on his business, and I tried thus to learn the secret of his trade. Then I bought a barber's bag in the bazaar at Ballapura, and one day I began to shave myself. With a few cuts I managed my chin very well, but when I got to the top of my head it was not so easy, and I began carving out patterns as though I were handling a piece of wood.

“The back of my head, I could not manage at all. O, friends, to shave the back of your head is the hardest piece of work a man ever had to do.” His listeners were silent and sympathetic, appreciating fully the evident emotion with which Lingappa made the last statement.

"Well, I had to give it up that day, and when the villagers saw me with my cut face, and the hair still growing at the back of my head, they laughed and jeered and mocked, and advised me to pray to my new God to send me a barber.

"While they were thus seeking to make my life a misery to me, I remembered the looking-glasses I had seen in the Dhorai's house, and I thought if I had a glass that would show the back of my head I could surely shave that too. Then I walked into Ballapura, and told the Dhorai my trouble, and asked if he could get me some looking-glasses. The Dhorai laughed kindly at my forlorn half shaved condition, and took from his drawer some sharp scissors and a razor, and shaved me himself."

"Bravo, bravo, well done," clapped Lingappa's hearers.

"When I went back to Lingapura, the people were astonished to see me shaved far better than the village barber could have done me," continued Lingappa with conscious pride, "and the next week Burton Dhorai sent me eight little looking-glasses that had come from Bangalore. These I fixed up round my room, and after a good many attempts and failures I succeeded in shaving my head all round. But it took me a long time, and I always had pains in my neck after twisting about so much, and at last I resolved to be done with the troublesome business, so I cut off my topknot, and now I shall never

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shave my head again," and as he concluded his story he took off his turban once more to show the admiring group around him a well shaped head with its crown no longer disfigured with the long hair twisted into a kind of knotted curl that is the joy and pride of every Hindu's heart.

While he talked on, one and another had been in and out of Miss Roi's study, and had gone away with heavier money bags and lighter hearts because of the sympathy and helpful counsel that had been extended to them.

At last all had been paid, and the workers had assembled for their monthly consecration meeting of prayer and praise. Then all had separated, and only Lingappa with his well grown daughter Sundari remained on the verandah.

Hilda smiled at them, and said they might have their talk together while she had her breakfast. After which she would be ready for a chat with Lingappa herself.

Sundari had stayed on in the school while her father had bravely faced his life amongst the heathen opposition of Lingapura, and while there, she had made the most of her opportunities for her studies, and had just made a very creditable pass in the third standard. She was a general favourite amongst her school companions, perhaps because she was such a willing worker both in the cook room, and in carrying the water from the deep well in the compound. But better than all, she had definitely made

choice of the Christian life, and had yielded her heart to the power of the Holy Spirit.

Standing side by side with her father she had received Christian baptism, and with him, too, she had confessed her faith in, and love for her Saviour, and had been publicly received as a member of the native Christian Church in Ballapura.

She and Nilamma had become fast friends, and together they often talked over their strong desire to become workers for God. She would never forget her experiences in Abu Taleb's harem, and over and over again she declared her determination to be like Ruth, the Bible woman, a messenger of the Lord's to go in and out amongst her own country women, and if possible also, amongst the women of Rokaia's faith, to carry the good news of deliverance from the power of sin through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lingappa was not ignorant of Sundari's desires, and his heart thrilled with joy every time they talked over the blessedness of being the servant of God. He shared with her the hopeful looking forward to the time when she should be old enough to leave school, and to commence to work in the village where she had been born.

As often as they met, they reverted to the same pleasant theme, first with regard to Sundari's own aspirations, and then concerning Nilamma's most cherished plans that she too

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should become a teacher. While Hilda Roi sat at her solitary breakfast, and afterwards took a hurried glance through her daily letters, the father and daughter talking together at one end of the veranda became so engrossed in the discussion of their usual topic, that they did not notice the flight of time, and Lingappa arose rather unprepared to respond to the bhoys' summons, calling him into Miss Roi's study.

It took him almost an hour to reach the point of his visit, and it was only when Hilda intimated it was time to go he said,

"The season has been a good one. The lime trees flourish, and my garden is still left to me. True the buffaloes are gone, but what of that?"

"You are much happier in Lingapura, are you not?"

"Yes, the opposition has almost ceased. If I had a wife," and he cast his eyes on the ground becomingly, "she could do much work for the Lord amongst the women of our village."

"I wish we had some one who could take up regular work there."

"The Missyamma is happy. She has so many young females to call her mother. They can cook rice and carry water; they can clean the house, and they have been to school, and learned to read and write."

"Yes, O Lingappa; I am indeed happy, but my children are all still young, and only learning to do all these things."

"Yet, the Missyamma must have a few well grown girls?"

"True, there are three or four growing up now, but to me, they seem still only children needing a mother's care."

Lingappa prefaced his answer with a long-drawn sigh. "I am a poor man. I have no one to cook my rice. No one to clean my house. No one to call me master," he said in a tone of self-pity which changed into one of delicate insinuation as he continued,

"I suppose the Missyamma could not spare one of her daughters to cook a poor man's rice."

"That quite depends, Lingappa, upon whom the poor man is, and which of my daughters he wants."

After that the way was easy for Lingappa to discuss the question of his marriage with one of the Christian girls from the mission home.

He declared he had no choice in the matter. Whichever one Hilda could spare the best, he would gladly receive; but when one or two names of eligible girls were mentioned to him, he put them on one side in such a way that Hilda saw very clearly some special one had attracted him.

"Sundari has a friend in the school—a good girl. She wants to be a teacher. Can she cook, and carry water?"

Hilda gave a little gasp as she realized Ling-

appa's thoughts were hovering around her beloved Nilamma.

At the close of another half hour's conversation, Lingappa became much more definite, and said positively that he wanted Nilamma for his wife, but would give way in deference to the Missyamma, and take another one instead if Missyamma so willed it.

But the Missyamma had become used to such proposals of marriage, and was by no means inclined to take upon herself the responsibility of substituting another in place of Lingappa's decided choice, and so she parted from him at last with the promise that she would have a few quiet words with Nilamma concerning him.

As he walked homewards that night, glad in the hope of once more having a wife in his home, Nilamma stood in the missionary's study listening with downcast eyes, nervously twitching fingers, and beating heart to the surprising news that Lingappa, Sundari's father had asked for her in marriage. Neither by word nor sign did she betray her own feelings in the matter, but with due maidenly propriety signified her desire to do exactly as the Missyamma wished her to.

"Oh no, my Nilamma, I cannot decide such an important question for you. You must make up your own mind on this occasion, and give a very decided yes, or an equally decided no, to our friend Lingappa," said Hilda in reply to Nilamma's vague words of partial assent, and then she

proceeded to tell her all she knew for and against the prospective husband, but it all sounded very cold and formal to her loving English heart, and she longed to assure the pretty little native girl that there must be some love on Lingappa's part, but he certainly had not mentioned any such sentiment.

He wanted some one to cook his rice, carry his water, and clean his house, so he had said, but Hilda believed in her own power at reading hearts, and she felt certain Lingappa's eyes had betrayed a deeper feeling when he had so cleverly turned the discussion round to Nilamma, Sundari's dearest friend; and so she ventured to say, "I believe he cares very much for you, dear Nilamma, and I am sure he will be good to you. Think about it, pray over it, and come back in a week's time—and tell me what answer I shall give to Sundari's father for you."

Sundari was hovering about outside, all impatience to know what was keeping Nilamma so long in the Missyamma's study, and when Nilamma joined her she could not hide her secret from the friend and companion of many happy days. It was with much shy reserve that Nilamma at last yielded to her importunities, and when the wonderful news was out Sundari clapped her hands with real pleasure and cried, "O my Nilamma: that is why my father always asks me so many questions about you, and I have told him how I love you, and how I want

to be so good and kind like you are. O Nilamma, my Nilamma, say yes, say yes."

In due course, Nilamma did say "Yes," and she has never had reason to regret her decision, for she has proved Lingappa to be a true Christian companion in the walk of life. She rests in the love of her husband who is brave in endurance, true to his convictions, and a loyal servant of the Heavenly Master whom she herself truly loves.

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